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From the Arab World to the American World: Transition and Adjustment Experiences of Muslim Women

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FROM THE ARAB WORLD TO THE AMERICAN WORLD: TRANSITION AND ADJUSTMENT EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM WOMEN

by

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This qualitative study explored the experiences of Muslim women from the Arab world who came to live and study in the U.S. This study gave voice to their daily lived experiences of transitioning to and adjusting to life and study in the American world. Nine bilingual women provided in depth responses to interviews and follow up phone calls. Women were raised in predominantly Muslim countries and attended institutions of higher education for the first time in the U.S. as international or domestic students, including refugees. Interviews were in English. Any spontaneous Arabic that was used by participants was immediately translated by the bilingual researcher and verified for accuracy with the participant. The constructivist and critical ideologist paradigms shaped this phenomenological research. Low inference descriptors and direct quotes were primarily used to tell their story. Their story began from the point in time before they left their home country to the present time when they were interviewed.

Seven themes emerged from the stories of the women in this study. Themes were grouped into three processes of transitioning, adjusting, and succeeding. In the transitioning process, women paint a picture of what life was like for them back home and when they first made the move to the U.S. This process included the themes titled (1) It's hard to say goodbye, which was about complicated goodbyes, and (2) Just like in the movies?, which was about the differences between expectations and reality they experienced. In the adjusting process, women

describe how they adjusted over time and experienced many challenges including discrimination. This process included the themes titled (3) I miss this, which was about the life they missed from back home, and (4) Life in America is hard work, which was about hard work and effort they were making in their life here. In the succeeding process, women shared the final part of their story on what aided or eased their adjustment and led to success. This process included the themes titled (5) Home away from home, which was about how they successfully coped with the loss of family and friends by developing their social support network here, (6) Inner strength and independence, which was about how they developed through faith, advocacy, and skills, and (7) Respect and understanding, which was about how changes occurred over time in their views on discrimination, America and Americans, people back home, and their own selves.

A recipe for success emerged from the stories of these women, as well as requests from them for others to accept and accommodate them. Connections to the literature on discrimination and the media, acculturation, ethnic identity, and religious identity are made in the discussion, as well as recommendations for higher education, psychology, counseling, and future research. A strong recommendation for individuals working with this population was given to become familiar with the requests women in this study made for acceptance and for accommodations.

Keywords: Muslim women, Islam, Arab, Arabic, refugees, international students, higher education, counseling, psychology, discrimination, acculturation, ethnic identity, religious identity

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

بسم الله الرَّحمان الرَّحي

Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahiim

"In the name of God, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful."

In Islam, it is encouraged to begin an endeavor with the words, *Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahiim* (in the name of God, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful), *Alhamdulillah* (all praises and thanks be to God Almighty), or purely *Bismillah* (in the name of God).

Peace and blessings to those who have supported and aided me in this journey of mine. To my family, my dissertation chair, my dissertation committee, my colleagues, and my friends. I love and cherish you all. I feel that Allah sent each of you to help me in this life. I believe the best thanks I can give you is to pray privately from the depth of my heart to see goodness come to you and your loved ones.

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CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview of Chapter I

Muslim women immigrants from predominantly Arabic speaking countries represent a very unique population in America. This identity overlaps many group memberships. These include, yet are not limited to, being a Muslim, a woman, a student of higher education, an Arabic speaker, and an immigrant from an Arab country. Literature is sparse on the transition experiences of Muslim women that have recently immigrated from predominantly Arabic speaking and Muslim countries in the Arab world to live and study in the U.S. There is a significant need to give voice to the experiences of these women.

This chapter reviews literature that is essential to set the stage for a deep understanding of these women's stories. To appreciate the story of a Muslim woman, detail must be provided on the beliefs and practices of Islam. These practices shape the cognitive, affective, and physical aspects of a Muslim woman's way of life. Explanations of important terminology in Islam and the pillars of Islam are provided.

Islam and the Arabic language are two of the most unique identifications of the population of this study. Arabic terms that have not been readily used in the English language are italicized. Those terms that are more widely used in their transliteration into the English language are left in normal type. These may be terms that the general population is more familiar with, or the more common terms used when writing about Islam in the English language.

To appreciate the story of a Muslim woman with origins in Arabia, some detail must be provided on the history of the Arab World. The rise and rapid spread of Islam began in what is

now known as the Arab World. The Arab World has historically been defined by varying criteria. Explanations must be provided on what exactly may be considered the Arab world for the purposes of this study. Explanations of this criteria and the chosen use of terminology for the purposes of this research are provided.

A framework in this chapter is provided to understand what a Muslim from the Arab World may experience. The literature review discusses Muslims from the Arab World who have moved to live in the U.S. A demographic sketch of Arabic speaking, Muslim, immigrants is provided. Demographics of the Arab, Middle Eastern, and Muslim immigrants, a history of immigration patterns, and common reasons for immigration are presented. Background on life is given, including family life, marriage and divorce, education, and careers. Political and historical events impacting Muslim immigrants' lives in the U.S. and immigration policies are discussed. Population statistical data are presented, as well as some higher education statistics.

The impact of the media and public image are reviewed. Both the American image of the Arab World and the Arab image of the American World are discussed. Reports of discrimination towards Arabs and Muslims are summarized. The impact of discrimination on migration is examined. Responses and reactions to discrimination in the U.S. are provided.

Key research on acculturation, identity, and acculturative stress are reviewed. This included religious and ethnic identity. Relevant and popular biographies, autobiographies, and reports or surveys are listed for reference. Those limited studies that were published with either a sample of Arab women or Muslim women are presented.

The identified gap in the research is discussed. The rationale and purpose for the topic of this research is given. The research questions that this study sought to answer are provided. Finally, the importance of this research and its implications are highlighted.

Islam

The Muslim woman experience of transition from the Arab world and adjustment to life in the U.S. can neither be written nor read without an understanding of Islam. These women may consider their homelands to be from over twenty different countries in the Arab region of the world. Each of these countries has its own unique culture, customs, and traditions. The ties that bind these countries and these women are Islam and the Arabic language. The beliefs and practices of Islam are the best way possible to describe shared or common values of these different countries. The beliefs and practices of Islam are the overarching similarities that can be drawn from this wide array of cultures. These are the shared values and ways of life. A humble request and condition is made to those learning about Islam to analyze this way of life with an inquisitive and open mind and spirit.

Islam is the fastest growing faith in the world, second in size of followers only to Christianity (Esposito, 2013). The Arabic word, Islam, means submission, surrender, and obedience (A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). Islam is derived from the word root *salama*, which means peace. Islam is not a derogatory, shaming, or humiliating sort of submission, surrender, or obedience. This is a peaceful, willing, and wanting form of submission, surrender, and obedience to knowledge and power immeasurably greater than your own – to God, to Allah. At its core, Islam is considered not as a religion, but as a way of life and the path to progress.

A Muslim is one who holds the beliefs of Islam and submits, or surrenders, to Allah (A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). Allah is the name of God in Arabic. Some of the many other names or characteristics for Allah are: *Al Malik* (the King), *As-Sallam* (The Peace and Blessing), *Al Khaliq* (The Creator), *Al-'Adl* (The Utterly Just),

Al-Halim (The Forbearing, The Indulgent), *Al-Hei* (The Ever Living), *Al-Awwal* (The First), *Al-Akhir* (The Last), *An-Noor* (The Light), *Al-Hadi* (The Guide), *As-Saboor* (The Patient, The Timeless). Muslims believe that there is only one God, that he is the God of all mankind, and that the purpose in life is to worship Allah. Muslims seek to obey Allah's guidance to mankind (Qur'an), submit to his will, and surrender to the all-powerful, all knowing, ever forgiving, and merciful.

Beliefs of Islam

The beliefs of Islam are in the oneness of Allah, existence of Allah's angels, faith in the transcriptions and prophets, life after death, and that Qur'an (word of Allah) was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions; A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). Whenever a prophet's name is mentioned or written, a prayer follows. Once more, Islam is the belief in the angels of Allah. Islam is the belief in Allah's guidance to mankind (Qur'an), revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) by Allah's angel. Islam is the belief that one day when this worldly life is over we will meet our maker in the next life, the afterlife.

Islam teaches that all the prophets carried the message of Allah, beginning with Adam (on him are the blessings and the peace of Allah; A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). Qur'an tells of prophets, including Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishmael (Ismail), Ishaq (Isaac), Yaqub (Jacob), Yusuf (Joseph), Musa (Moses), and so on to Eysa (Jesus) and lastly Muhammad (peace be upon them). Biblical names for Mohammad may be known as Paraclete or Ahmad. Other spellings of Ahmad have been Ahmet or Ehmet. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) will also be called by the name Ahmad in

the heavens. The names Ahmad and Muhammad both have the meaning of one who is praiseworthy.

Prophets (peace be upon them) carried the message of God (A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). They spread the message of books revealed by God: Torah of Moses, Psalms of David, and Gospel of Jesus.

> And (mention) when Jesus, the son of Mary, said, 'O children of Israel, indeed I am the messenger of Allah to you confirming what came before me of the Torah and bringing good tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name is Ahmad.' But when he (Ahmad) came to them with clear evidences, they said, 'This is obvious magic' (*Qur'an,* 61:16; this is the standard method of citing Qur'an and this citation style will be explained more in the coming paragraphs).

Although there can be no accurate literal direct translation of each word of Qur'an in isolation of context, English translations do provide a translation to the meaning of Qur'an. The above verse of the Qur'an describes when Jesus (peace be upon him) told the children of Israel that he was a messenger and there would be a messenger after him. But when Muhammad (peace be upon him) came to them with clear signs, they did not believe him.

None of the books of God have been preserved as Qur'an has for the past 1400 years (A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). Qur'an remains in written form and in recitation in the original Arabic in which it was revealed. Allah has made a guarantee in Qur'an to its readers that he will protect and preserve it. Torah, Psalms, and Gospel have been succeeded and surpassed by Qur'an. Readers of Qur'an are obliged to investigate its miracle.

Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions) is the final messenger, and there will be no others until the day of judgment (A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). *Sunnah* are the ways, life, and teachings of the final prophet, Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him). Hadith is an extensive and detailed compilation of *sunnah.* Hadith is a supplement to Qur'an. Hadith contain a collection of sayings and traditions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). They provide a code of behavior that Muslims aspire to. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) illustrated the real life implementation of the word of Allah. Muslims aspire to this and to follow in the ways of this exceptional messenger and those before him.

Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions) was illiterate prior to revelation (A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). He was commanded by Allah's angel, Gabriel, to read Qur'an that was revealed to him. Henceforth, he read and recited Qur'an as it was revealed to him from memory. Devout Muslims throughout history and to the present day memorize the 114 *surah* of the Qur'an. S*urah* is similar to chapter, and *ayah* is similar to verse. A Muslim who has memorized the entire Qur'an in Arabic, chapter and verse, is called *hafiz.* Qur'an is recited in Arabic from memory during prayers multiple times each day, all over the world, by millions of Muslims. Literally, the Qur'an is recited in one language all over the world, as the one and a half billion Muslims alive today reside across seven continents (Esposito, 2013). One in four people worldwide are Muslim, and two out of three Muslims live in Asia.

Al-Fatiha is the opening scripture of the holy Qur'an. The translation is the "opening" or the "reading" (*English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). It is a prayer requesting

guidance for the best path to be laid ahead. It is a request for direction in the worldly life. It is a prayer asking for Allah to show the way and to help. The entire Qur'an, which follows *Al-Fatiha*, is the answer to this prayer for guidance. The English translation of the meaning of *Al-Fatiha* (The Opening) is:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. (1) Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, (2) The Beneficent, the Merciful. (3) Owner of the Day of Judgment, (4) Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help. (5) Show us the straight path, (6) The path of those whom Thou hast favoured. Not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray. (7; *Qur'an*, 1:1-7.)

The standard method of citing Qur'an is with the *surah* or chapter number (*Al-Fatiha* is *surah* number one) then the *ayah* or verse number or numbers (*Al-Fatiha* has seven verses thus the citation *Qur'an*, 1:1-7).

Embracing Islam

Embracing Islam is through both belief and action. "*La Illaha Illallahu Muhammadur Rassolullah,"* is to be recited by every Muslim entering Islam (A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). The translation of the meaning is, "There is none worthy of worship except *Allah* (the One and Only God) and Muhammad is the *Rasool* (Messenger/Prophet) of *Allah*" (*English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an*, p.13). This is a statement containing *tawheed* and is the first of five pillars of Islam (A'la Mawdudi). The pillars are *ibadah,* acts of worship. *Tawheed* is the belief in the oneness of Allah, and was the most important message of Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions). *Tawheed* is the deep belief in the unity of God and a statement that there is no other god but God.

To embrace Islam, one is required to make the statement containing *tawheed*, follow Qur'an, and follow *sunnah* (traditions of Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions; A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997, p. 13). This first pillar of Islam does not deny existence of other prophets, only of other gods. Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him) was not the only prophet of Allah. He was the last prophet. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was not sent for only the Arabs or only the people of his time; he is a prophet for all and his teachings were meant to be followed for the rest of time.

The remaining four pillars of Islam are *salah* (*fajr, dhuhr, asr, maghrib,* and *isha* prayers performed at five designated times per day), *sawm* (fasting during the holy month of Ramadan), *zakah* (yearly minimum duty to the poor), and hajj (pilgrimage once in a lifetime to the holy house of Mecca; A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). People learned how to pray from Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions). Prayer is a reminder to Muslims of Allah throughout the day. Muslims are prescribed to pray the five obligatory prayers per day, and may perform additional prayers as desired at different times of the day. Devout Muslims will stop whatever they are doing, wherever they may be, to perform the obligatory prayers.

Prayers are performed with both belief and action (A'la Mawdudi, 1986). *Surah* in the Qur'an are recited in each *salah* during a repeated sequence of standing, bowing, prostrating, and sitting. Muslims recite Al-Fatiha in Arabic two to four times in each of the five obligatory prayers. Recalling that Al-Fatiha is a prayer for guidance, this means Muslims are asking for guidance throughout the day in all their affairs. *Fajr* is performed before dawn. *Dhuhr* is after the zenith of the sun. A*sr* is when the sun is midway through its descent prior to dusk. *Maghrib* is

between dusk and complete darkness. *Isha* is from when it is completely dark until right before the break of dawn, or only until midnight according to some scholars.

In Muslim countries, an *adthan*, or call to *salah*, is heard ringing in unison from the mosques throughout the streets. This call is made before each of the five prescribed prayer times. The call is made prior to the prescribed time in order to give Muslims a chance to complete the required cleansing for *salah*, or *wuduh*. *Salah* can be performed individually or in congregation. Prayer in congregation, whether in the mosque or another location, is recommended whenever possible. Men are required to attend *Jummah,* Friday congregational prayers for *dhuhr*, in the mosque. Attending *Jummah* is always optional for women. During menses and for forty days post-partum, women are exempt from *salah* (Badawi, 1971).

The way of dress for a Muslim male and female are specified in *salah,* and in public (A'la Mawdudi, 1986). Muslim men and women are to dress modestly. For men, outer garments or coverings should at a minimum extend from the naval to the knees. For women, outer garments or coverings should extend from head to toe, with the face and hands visible. The head scarf is worn over the hair or wrapped around the head and neck. This way of modest dress, or hijab, shows and highlights only the woman's face.

Sawm, the third pillar of Islam, is fasting by abstaining from any eating, drinking, sexual activity, smoking, lying, gossiping, and moral offensiveness (A'la Mawdudi, 1986). *Sawm* occurs from dawn to dusk. *Sawm* is prescribed for able Muslims every day during the holy month of Ramadan. During menses and during pregnancy, women are exempt from *sawm* in Ramadan (Badawi, 1971). The month of Ramadan is the ninth month of the lunar year. The number of days Ramadan lasts depends on the sighting of the moon; it is between 29 to 30 days long. In addition to Ramadan, Muslims may fast other days as well throughout the year. *Sawm* is

an act of worship. There are both spiritual and physical benefits to *sawm.* There is a large celebration following the final day *of sawm* in Ramadan, which is a holiday for Muslims. Eid al-Fitr, festival of fast-breaking, begins with a special morning Eid prayer in the mosque and festivities follow.

The fourth pillar of Islam is *zakah*, which is an obligatory payment by every Muslim who is financially secure above a specified level (A'la Mawdudi, 1986). Anyone who has an equivalent of four ounces of gold in savings year-round is required to pay *zakah.* The minimum annual payment is 2 ½ % of the cash balance that a Muslim has kept in excess year-round (also may be interpreted as 2 ½ % of one's savings). Again, these savings must also be at a minimum of four ounces worth in gold to qualify as a one who is required to pay *zakah*. Though 2 ½ % is the required minimum *zakah*, the more one pays the more reward they receive. *Zakah* is a way of purifying wealth. *Zakah* minimizes attachment to worldly means. Qur'an specifies that *zakah* has eight receivers. Those receivers of *zakah* are the poor, the helpless, collectors and distributors of *zakah* itself, new converts to Islam, captives in need of ransom, the destitute, those serving in the way of Allah, and the traveler in need (*Qur'an.* 9: 60; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997).

The fifth pillar of Islam is hajj, or performance of ceremonies of the pilgrimage (A'la Mawdudi, 1986). Hajj is required once in a Muslim's life. Hajj occurs during the lunar month of Dhul-Hijjah. Hajj is prescribed for those adults only who are able and can afford to make the journey. Hajj is an inner and outer journey of devotion and worship. The hajj is to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia. Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) built a house for the worship of Allah at Mecca. Muslims all over the world face in the direction of the Ka'bah*,* this sacred house of Allah, during prayers. During hajj, over two million pilgrims visit the Ka'bah together and pray

for forgiveness. Hajj unites Muslims from around the world to one common location and for one common purpose - worship. During the days of hajj, there is a large celebration that is another holiday for Muslims. Eid al-Adha, festival of sacrifice, begins with a special morning Eid prayer in the mosque, the sacrifice of an animal (cattle, camels, sheep, or goats), spreading of meat from the sacrificed animal to the poor, feasts, and gift giving.

Women in Islam

The importance of women, marriage, family, and community is great in Islam (*English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). Islam recognizes the roles of women as mothers, as daughters, as scholars, as leaders in trade, and as the builders of the foundation of society. The role of the mother is highly revered. The mother is the individual in the worldly life that is afforded the best treatment above all others. Marriage is a foundation for faith, family, and community. The family unit is viewed as the building block of a community. Families and communities are not to live in isolation of one another, but in aid of one another. Prayers and supplications of peace and prosperity are made for the individual, for the family, for ancestors, and for the community.

Social life and interaction with the greater society for the greater good is the prescribed life style. During the time of Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions), the mosque was a center of life (A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). It was not only a place of worship and prayer, but a community center where festivities, gatherings, and social functions revolved around. Contracts for marriage, as well as divorce, occur at the mosque. Marriage is a basis for spirituality in Islam (Badawi, 1971). Marriage brings together two halves to complete a whole. "Of His signs is that he created for you mates from among yourselves that you may find

comfort with them, and He planted love and mercy for each other in your hearts; surely, there are signs in this for those who think about it" (*Qur'an,* 30:21; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an*).

A marriage ceremony for Muslims includes a *nikah,* or Islamic marriage contract (Abdul Hannan, 1997). The conditions that must be met are that there is a clear proposal, a clear acceptance, two witnesses, and a marriage gift from the husband to the wife. A woman's lineage is protected after marriage and she keeps her family's last name. A woman's wealth is protected after marriage. Any wealth that she has or earns and chooses to spend on the family or assist her husband with is considered charity. That is, a woman is not required to spend of any of her wealth in a marriage; the man is financially responsible to provide for all the basic needs of the family.

Men are to maintain their relations with women in kindness or part with women in kindness (*English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997; *Qur'an,* 65:1-12). Divorce is permitted in Islam by necessity, but it is neither recommended nor encouraged (*English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* p. 645). Islam is a balanced path, encouraging pursuit of balance while maintaining the prescribed boundaries. In Islam, women are given the right to choose their spouse and to divorce their spouse. There is a *surah* in the Qur'an titled At-Talaq (The Divorce; *Qur'an,* 65:1-12). The conditions and kindnesses to follow in the case of a divorce are stipulated. This *surah* focuses heavily on the kindnesses men are to adhere to towards women.

There is a *surah* in the Qur'an titled, Al-Nisa (The Women; *Qur'an,* 4:1-176). The *surah* has a central theme of building family and community (*English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). This *surah* reveals rights of women. Women have the right to own property,

to earn wealth, and to be given an inheritance. In Islam, rights are given. Allah has all rights over his creation. The Qur'an, the word of Allah, has rights over its readers. Parents have rights over their children, and children have rights over their parents. Men have rights over women, and women have rights over men. The system is one of equity. Husbands are responsible for providing for the family, and wives are responsible for management of the family (A'la Mawdudi, 1986). Children are responsible in adulthood for providing and caring for their parents.

Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions) fought for social justice and equity for women (Badawi, 1971; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). This was radical for his time. Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him) preached that the most perfect in faith among the believers is he who is best in manners to his wife. When women complained to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that their fathers had forced them into marriage, he gave them the choice to annul or to end their marriage. He made it clear that in Islam, there is freedom of choice in marriage.

Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions) showed people the ideal. Many of these ideals have been implemented today, and many are still being fought for. Throughout history, injustices have been committed in the name of religion and Islam is not immune to this. The followers of Islam are humans with free will; the teachings of Islam are divine. Male chauvinism is a universal ailment that presents itself in every society. Bigotry and sexism are spiritual and cultural illnesses. All forms of oppression are prohibited in Islam. Islam puts forward a worldly life of travel towards a path to peace.

Resources on Islam

The Internet is the most readily available resource to obtain information on Islam. Within the last ten years, Internet sites have made Qur'an available for free in both written and audio formats. Transliterations and translations of the meaning of Qur'an have also been made available in all major world languages online. Transliterations provide the method to pronounce the Arabic words through a written form of the language of familiarity. For example, *salah, sawm,* and *zakah* are all transliterations. They use the English language to teach how to pronounce Arabic words. Although Internet sites are constantly changing, most the major sites that promote Islam are schools, foundations, and non-profit organizations that have been consistently made available for a decade or more. There are numerous sites solely for the purpose of misdirection or slander of Islam. An uninformed web search will easily lead to any number of these sites. Knowledge of reliable sites and sources is a duty, or obligation, to promote the spread of truthful information about Islam.

English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an (1997) is available through Al-Quraan.org in hard copy for purchase and available for free to read online. Al-Quraan.org provides introductions to each *surah,* which explain when the *surah* was revealed and provide the needed historical context. Altafsir.com provides free in depth explanations of the meaning of Qur'an by different well-known scholars. Quran.com provides the Arabic scriptures side by side with transliteration and translation of the meaning. Translations are available for free on this site in Albanian, Azerbaijani, Bangla, Bosnian, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, English, Farsi, Finnish, French, German, Hausa, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Malay, Malayalam, Maranao, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Tamil, Tatar, Thai, Turkish, Urdu, and Uzbek.

QuranExplorer.com is a free web site in which recitation of Qur'an can be heard. There is a link on the main page to launch Quran Explorer and to launch Hadith Explorer. These links are to portals that do not require any downloading. The Quran Explorer portal provides the Arabic scriptures side by side with translation of the meaning in a choice of several languages. Simultaneously, the scriptures can be recited in Arabic with a choice of who gives the recitation. There is also an option for each verse to be recited in Arabic, followed by a recitation of the translation of the meaning in English. That is, Qur'an can be heard line by line in Arabic first, then the meaning in English. Further, there are search tools that allow any term to be entered and results displayed from the entire Qur'an and hadith. With these resources, a speaker of just about any language has access to hear and follow Qur'an in Arabic, along with understanding the meaning in their own language.

IslamicFinder.org provides prayer times for 6 million cities around the world. It is essential that Muslims have access to the prayer times, particularly when living in a country where the *adthan* cannot be heard throughout the streets. There is free software available so Muslims can hear the *adthan* from their computer or phone five times a day, for each prayer time. This site provides links to Muslim owned businesses, mosques, Islamic organizations, and Islamic centers. Holiday cards for Eid are available, as well as an Islamic photo gallery. There is also an Islamic web directory with information on Islam, Qur'an, hadith, Islamic history, education, family, health, medicine, economy, and commerce.

A toll-free line, 1-877-WHY-ISLAM, is staffed with volunteers to answer questions about Islam. WhyIslam.org features free brochures in English, Spanish, or Chinese, and free literature that can be ordered or viewed online. In addition to ordering free materials, the site will arrange for a visit to a local mosque anywhere in the U.S. or Canada. Some of the brochure titles

are: Islam Explained, Concept of Worship in Islam, Origin of the Qur'an, Human Rights in Islam, Women in Islam, Hijab – Unveiling the Mystery, Life After Death, What Does Islam Say About Terrorism?, Malcolm X – From Darkness to Light.

The web sites described provide resources to obtain information on Islam; they also provide an indication of the types of things Muslims need access to when living in a predominantly non-Muslim country. An overview has been provided on Islam, beliefs and practices, and every day ways of living. The beliefs and practices of Islam are the core values that will change the least from country to country, and from person to person. For example, *tawheed, salah, sawm, zakah,* and hajj are universal concepts and practices for all Muslims. A follower of Islam will not debate the existence of these core pillars of Islam. For another example, the content of the meals of the feasts during Ramadan may be different, but *sawm* during Ramadan will not change. Similarly, the types of festivities on the day of Eid may vary; however, the practice of celebrating Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha will not. Although each and every individual will be at a unique point in his or her journey to faith and path to progress, these are the most common, or familiar, values and cultural practices that can be expected to be held by a Muslim woman. Some attention will now be given to understanding the ancestry and origins of a Muslim woman of Arab descent.

Arab

Terminology

Arab League, Arab world, and Middle East are the most commonly used terms to identify the geographical origins of an individual of Arab descent. Twenty-two countries form the Arab League (Harb, 2013). In Asia, these countries are Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon,

Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, The United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. In Africa, these countries are Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia. Palestine is identified as a country in definitions of the Arab League. The term Arab world refers to the 18 Arab states (Stowasser, 2013). In Asia, the Arab states are the same as the Arab League, with the exception of Palestine. In Africa, the Arab states are also the same as the Arab League, with the exception of Djibouti and Somalia. Although, sometimes Comoros, Djibouti, and Somalia are included in the definition of the Arab states because they belong to the Arab League.

The term Middle East has historically referred to those countries that are to the south of the Black Sea and border the Mediterranean Sea (Cuno, 2013; Middle East, 2013). In Asia, these countries are the same as the Arab League, with the addition of Iran, Israel (and the Israeli-occupied West Bank), and Turkey. The original term Middle East included Cyprus in Asia simply due to its geographic location, even though the majority of the population there is Greek. The original definition also excluded most African countries. The only African country originally included in definitions of the Middle East was Egypt. Afghanistan and Pakistan in Asia, and Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia in Africa are now accepted culturally as part of the Middle East due to the majority of Muslims living there; however, none of these countries are included in other given definitions of the Middle East.

As described above, there is ambiguity in identifying a single agreed upon grouping of countries that comprise the Middle East or Arab world. Population estimates can be rough, at best. Approximately 383 million inhabit the Middle East (Cuno, 2013), and 250 million the Arab world (Stowasser, 2013). The terms Middle Eastern and Arab are often seen being used interchangeably for race, ethnicity, ancestry, descent, nationality, and/or country of origin.

Arab is not always an adequate identification for people from countries in the Middle East, and Middle Eastern is not always synonymous with Arab. For example, Iran, Israel, and Turkey are Middle Eastern but not Arab countries (Ameri & Ramey, 2000a). These countries are considered part of the Middle East, yet they are not part of the Arab League, are not predominantly Arabic speaking, and Israel is not a predominantly Muslim country. Further, Egypt is still sometimes the only African country included in many definitions of the Middle East even though there are several other African countries that are predominantly Arabic speaking and Muslim.

A Middle Easterner who does not identify as Arab may be someone from Afghanistan, Cyprus, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, or Turkey in Asia, and Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia in Africa. Individuals from these African countries may not identify with the term Arab as a race or ethnicity even when their country is a member of the Arab League. They may, however, identify with the term Arab as a nationality or a country of origin. Clarifications are important to understand the history of this region and the group and self-identifications of its peoples. Either term, Middle Eastern or Arab, may refer to the population of interest in this study, immigrants from predominantly Muslim and Arabic speaking countries located in North Africa and Asia.

Arabic Defining "Arab"

The notion of Arab culture is a myth. There is no overarching or agreed upon set of values, principles, or beliefs that encompasses more than twenty very diverse countries in the Middle East. For this reason, the beliefs and practices of Islam have been described. These are the philosophies, as well as the daily habits and behaviors that are shared among this grouping of predominantly Muslim and Arabic speaking countries. Although there will be many inevitable

discrepancies in the terms used to identify the geographical origins of a Muslim woman of Arab descent, there are no discrepancies regarding identification of religion and of language. Muslim women of interest for this research will identify as Arabic speakers. The use of the Arabic language is a unifying force among Muslims, and a defining force among Arabs. Arabic is the native language for 92% of the people living in countries that form the Arab League (Ameri & Ramey, 2000a).

The three types of Arabic are Classical (Qur'an, poetry, and literature), Modern Standard (official language of the Arab world, modern literature, and television), and Colloquial (commonly spoken language, dialects differing by countries in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage). There are the thirty main dialects that are spoken in the Arabic language (Hammond, 2005a). The Egyptian, Algerian, Maghrebi (Moroccan), Sudanese, Saidi (Upper Egyptian), North Levantine, Mesopotamian (Iraqi), and Najdi (Saudi) are among the top main dialects. The Egyptian dialect is the most spoken dialect.

Though there are many dialects spoken in Arabic, the classical Arabic that Qur'an is written in is one unifying force among Muslims (Hammond, 2005a). The classical Arabic that Qur'an is written in has remained preserved and unaltered for more than 1400 years. This is called *i'jazah* of Qur'an. *I'jazah* has provided unity through language for Muslims, and Arabic has provided definition for the Arabs, even though the various dialects exist. There are interpretations, explanations, or translations of the meaning of Qur'an in most languages. There exists no translation of the text to a different language than the classical Arabic it is written in. In other words, *salah* is performed in Arabic by all Muslims all over the world. Al-Fatiha cannot be translated and recited as such into any other language; it is prescribed to only be recited in Arabic to perform *salah*. "If it had not been for the idea of the *i'jaaz*, the Arabic term for the

perfection of the Quran, a concept that effectively blocked any movement to translate the text into other languages, the Arabs today might not be the Arabs" (Hammond, 2005a, p. 330).

Arab Muslim Immigrants

An Arab who immigrates to the U.S. is a person who has undergone a physical transition. The U.S. is a nation settled by immigrants seeking to establish a new residence. People from every country in the world have sought new opportunities through immigration. Arabic speaking Muslim women who move from the Arab world to live and study in the American world are often placed in the category of international student. This classification of international student is not always best fitting for this group. These women are in true essence, immigrants. Immigration is the movement of persons from one country or locality to another for the purpose of establishing a new permanent or semi-permanent residence (Martin, 2013). The term immigrant has been widely used to refer to individuals who are undergoing or have undergone this process of transitioning and adjusting to a new country.

Immigrant Demographics

The history and the development of the U.S. have been intertwined with immigration history and trends. The dates of immigrant arrivals first began to be documented in 1820 (Martin & Midgley, 2006). Although this is the case, historians estimate that the flow of immigrants actually began around thirty years earlier in 1790. There are a number of both voluntary and involuntary reasons why immigrants have undertaken this transition and adjustment experience to life in a new land (Martin, 2013). Some voluntary reasons may include economic gain, employment, education, relationships, family, and marriage. Some involuntary reasons may

include natural disaster, war, persecution, escape from poverty, evasion of criminal justice, abuse, oppression, slave trade, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.

Since the beginning of documented immigrant arrivals into the U.S. borders, immigrants have played a significant and important role in empowering the growth of the country's labor force (Martin & Midgley, 2006). In 2011, approximately one million immigrants were granted legal permanent resident status, seven hundred thousand were naturalized, sixty thousand were admitted as refugees, thirteen thousand were granted asylum, and ten thousand were adopted (Department of Homeland Security, 2012). About one hundred and sixty million travelers for work, study, family, or leisure entered the U.S. in 2011. Approximately two million of these immigrant admissions were students. Foreign immigration has become one of the most powerful demographic, social, and economic forces in the nation.

When the first immigrants from the Arab world came to the United States, they lived close to one another and began family run businesses (Ameri & Ramey, 2000b). The focus was not on the individual or individual success. The focus was on the family and maintaining familial ties long term. Most Arabs were employed in management, professional, and related occupations (42%; Brittingham & de la Cruz; 2005). They worked to establish roots so that their extended families could eventually come to live and work with them in the U.S. Other areas of employment included sales and office (30%), service (12%) and production or transportation (11%).

Arabic is the main language of immigrants from Arab countries; however, Islam is not the main religion of immigrants from Arab countries. Although more than 90% of inhabitants of the Middle East are Muslims (with small percentages of Christians and Jews; Cuno, 2013; Stowasser, 2013), the majority of immigrants from the Arab countries to the U.S. are Christian

(Arab American Institute, 2004; Kayyali, 2006b). The major religions of immigrants from Arab countries are, respectively, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Druze. The Druze are monotheistic and most are from mountain regions of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan. Arab Americans living in the United States are estimated to be 35% Catholic, 24% Muslim, 20% Orthodox, 13% Other Religion/No Affiliation, and 11% Protestant (Arab American Institute). Lebanese Christians, Palestinian Christians, Iraqi Chaldeans, and Egyptian Copts make up a majority of the Arab Christians. Jewish Arabs are those who primarily emigrated from Syria (Kayyali).

Historically, there were three waves of Arab immigration to the U.S. (Orfalea, 2006). The first wave of immigrants (1878 to 1924) came from Syria and Lebanon and settled mostly into what is now New York City. The second wave of immigrants (1948 to 1966) were Palestinians who also settled into New York. The third wave of immigrants (1967 to 2005) were Iraqis, Egyptians, and Yemenis, who settled into Michigan and Illinois. The Arab immigrants to the U.S. kept close immediate and extended family relationships and ties over time and by geographic location. Although Arabs are geographically dispersed throughout the U.S., 94% of Arabs still live together in large, urban cities (Arab American Institute Foundation, 2000b; 2012). Los Angeles, Detroit, New York/New Jersey, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. are the cities with the largest numbers of Arabs.

There are no clear data provided for the distribution of the combined Arab and Muslim population by geographic location in the U.S. There are, however, exact figures for states with the largest numbers of mosques. This is another example where although cultural, racial, ethnic, and geographic identifications of Arab may be indistinct, the religious identification of Muslim is clear. California clearly has the largest numbers of buildings used for worship by Muslims, with 227 mosques listed (U.S. Department of State, 2002b). Following California, are New York

(140), New Jersey (86), Michigan (73), Pennsylvania (67), Texas (67), Ohio (66), Illinois (57), and Florida (57).

Surely, there is an overlap with the states that have the highest Arab concentrations (Arab American Institute Foundation, 2000b), and the states having the highest numbers of mosques. Overall, California, New York, New Jersey, Michigan, and Illinois seem to be the five states in which an overwhelming majority of Arabs and Muslims have settled and fostered communities. Historically, the advantage of concentrated populations of Arab Muslims in selected cities had a purpose. Keeping close-knit ties was essential for the early immigrants in order to develop and advance the family, extended family, and community.

The importance of family to the Muslim way of life has been discussed. Actually, marrying was declared by the Prophet Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions) as his *sunnah*, a recommended act for true followers of Islam (Abdul Hannan, 1997). The majority of Arabs living in the U.S. (57.5%) were married couples (Brittingham & de la Cruz, 2005). Among the Arabs, Palestinians and Jordanians had the highest percentages of married-couples (70%). Arab households that were separated, widowed, or divorced were 12.5%. As discussed earlier in the section on Women in Islam, divorce is permitted by necessity, but it is neither recommended nor encouraged (*English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an*, 1997, p. 645). The statistics represent that the typical Arab household maintained family and extended family members. Only 28% of all Arabs living in the U.S. did not live with any family members, and only 6% of Arab women living in the U.S. were living alone.

Arab women had significantly lower incomes than Arab men, with the average income for Arab men at $41, 700 and for Arab women at $31, 800 (Brittingham & de la Cruz; 2005).

Compared to 73% of males working, only 46% of females were working. Family income average was $52,300 in 2000 and not much of an increase was apparent over time. The 2008 median income report was $56, 331 (Arab American Institute Foundation, 2013). The most likely to be in poverty were Arab children under 18 (22%), especially Iraqi children (41%; Brittingham & de la Cruz). Although this is the vulnerable population to poverty, a majority of Arabs living in the U.S. are financially secure and well educated. A high of 80% of Arabs living in the U.S. had a high school diploma or higher education. Forty-one percent had a minimum of a bachelor's degree, which was almost double that of the U.S. population at that time. Egyptians ranked highest with 94% having a high school diploma or more and 64% with a bachelor's or more, and Iraqis ranked lowest with 73% and 36% respectively.

Population Statistics

Actual population estimates in the U.S. for those who self identify as Arab, Middle Eastern, or Muslim are questionable. Agreed upon and up to date figures are rarely found. The questionability is due to the discrepancies in the way these populations are defined by their representative surveys and media accusations of under or over reporting (Power, 1998). The lack of agreed upon figures is due to the fact that responses indicating religious affiliation are not included or reported to be calculated in U.S. census surveys (U.S. Census, 2005) and that the U.S. Immigration Service does not keep record of the religion of immigrants (U.S. Department of State, 2002a). Thus, estimates for Arabs living in the U.S. include Muslims as well as non-Muslims, and do not number down by race/ethnicity. Hence, there is considerable difficulty in locating estimates that include only Arab or Middle Eastern Muslims. After explaining both types of results (those providing numbers of Arabs, and those providing numbers of Muslims),

the best available approximation will be provided based on these surveys for the number of Arab Muslims living in the U.S.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2005) reported 1.2 million people from the Census 2000 who self-identified with a given definition of Arab. Again, these numbers do not provide a breakdown by religion (Islam). The Census 2000 also estimated that there were 115,000 illegal immigrants from the Middle East, not including immigrants from North Africa (i.e. Egypt and Algeria). The Census 2000 definition of Arab included responses such as Arab, Egyptian, Iraqi, Jordanian, Lebanese, Middle Eastern, Moroccan, North African, Palestinian, Syrian, Kurds, or Berbers to the question on ancestry, "What is this person's ancestry or ethnic origin?" Those who self-identified as Somalian or Sudanese were not included in the Arab count (U.S. Census Bureau), though they are part of the Arab League (Ameri & Ramey, 2000a).

The Arab American Institute Foundation (AAIF; 2000a; 2000b) used the Census 2000 data to estimate that 3.5 million Arabs lived in the United States. This estimate included Arab Muslims, as well as Arabs from the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant faith. When the AAIF (2012) utilized the Census 2010 data, estimates of Arabs living in the U.S. did not seem to increase much at all. Census 2010 totals for a given definition of Arab according to the Arab American Institute were approximately two million. The AAIF adjusted this population total from 2 million to approximately 3.7 million, also citing likely errors due to undercounting and misrepresentation. The AAIF cites that census data has undercounted the number of Arabs living in the U.S. by as much as 60%.

The stage has been set to understand the complexities in obtaining anywhere near adequate counts of Arabs living in the U.S. In addition, the AAIF (2000a) reports clarified that those from Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia,

Tunisia, The United Arab Emirates, and Yemen were considered Arabs in survey counts, but not those from Somalia, Sudan, or Mauritania. The approximations provided by ethnic background of Arab immigrants were 39% Lebanese, 18% Arab/Arabic, 12% Egyptian, 12% Syrian, 7% Other Arab, 6% Palestinian, 3% Iraqi, and 3% Moroccan. As evident by the categories, an individual could have listed a language (Arabic) as an ethnic background, and not an ethnicity or country of origin. Further compounding matters, there is no consistency or clarity as to how an individual may have responded or been grouped into a category such as "Other Arab." Clearly, the categories are multiple and overlapping. This is indicative of the lack of consensus both within groups and between groups in identifying a given definition of Arab.

As for the small numbers of Muslims that do live in the U.S, there is even greater difficulty to provide an accurate estimation of size or growth at any given period of time. Pew Research Center (2009) estimated four million Muslims living in the U.S. Power (1998) estimated 6 million Muslims in the U.S. Zogby International (2000) estimated 7 million Muslims living in the U.S. Power provided a breakdown of Muslims living in the U.S. by race/ethnicity, 42% African American, 24.4% Asian, 21% other, 12.4% Arab. This breakdown provides an estimated 744,000 (12.4% of 7 million) Arab Muslims living in the U.S. Again, since people from certain parts of the Middle East, such as Libya or Sudan, may not identify as Arab, many from the Middle East likely fell into this "Other" category. Zogby included an option of Middle East (Not Arab).

The racial/ethnic distribution of Muslims living in the U.S. according to the Zogby polls is 26.2% Middle Eastern (Arab), 24.7% South Asian, 23.8% African American, 11.6% Other, 10.3% Middle Eastern (Not Arab), and 6.4% East Asian. This breakdown provides an estimated 2.74 million (36.5% of 7 million) Middle Eastern (Arab and Not Arab) Muslims living in the

U.S. Although individuals from Somalia, Sudan, or Mauritania are not included in this number, three million is the best available approximation for the population in the U.S. of Arab and Middle Eastern Muslims. Arab American organizations and polling companies, such as Zogby International, are considered to be more accurate and accepted figures for the U.S. Arab population (Kayyali, 2006a). This may be so due to the vested interest Arab American organizations have in providing an accurate representation; however, overrepresentation is also a critique that has been posed.

Given the complexities of simply obtaining a population statistic for those identifying with the term Arab and what comprises a definition of the term Arab, imagine the complexities and nuances in utilizing this term as a perceived group identity. For the purposes of this study, the defining factors of the female participants will be that they are Muslims, Arabic speakers, and have moved from their countries of origin in the Arab World to live and study in the U.S. It is not necessary that they attach to a given definition of Arab, simply that they have migrated to the U.S. from their country of origin in the Arab World. For the purposes of writing, referencing, and reviewing the literature, the terms Arab and Middle East will be continue to be used concurrently as they are used in their respective sources.

Higher Education Statistics

From the estimated three million Arab and Middle Eastern Muslims living in the U.S., there is no clear data available as to how many nationwide are female immigrants and students of higher education. There is, however, nationwide data available on the total number of international students in the U.S., number of students by country of origin, and number of students by gender. The Institute of International Education (IIE) receives funding from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs within the U.S. Department of State. The IIE

publishes *Open Doors*, which is an annual census report that provides demographics on international students living in the U.S.

In the 2009/2010 academic year, there were 690,923 international students in the U.S (Institute of International Education, 2010a). This is 3.5% of the total number of students (19,562,000) in higher education in the U.S. A little over half were male (55.2%; Institute of International Education, 2010b). There were a total of 31,747 international students from Arabic speaking Muslim countries in the 2009/2010 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2010c). This is a little over four percent (4.59%) of the total number of all international students in higher education in the U.S. in that academic year. This is also less than two tenths of a percent (0.16%) of the total number of all students in higher education in the U.S. in that academic year.

Individual numbers of students in higher education in the U.S. by continent of transfer are as follows (Institute of International Education, 2010a). In Asia: Bahrain (415), Iraq (423), Jordan (1,995), Kuwait (2,442), Lebanon (1,608), Oman (286), Palestine (304), Qatar (663), Saudi Arabia (15,810), Syria (424), The United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.; 1,653), and Yemen (265). In Africa: Algeria (178), Comoros (50), Djibouti (3), Egypt (2,271), Eritrea (164), Libya (1,064), Mauritania (52), Morocco (1,120), Somalia (36), Sudan (213), and Tunisia (308). No data was provided for Western Sahara (S.A.D.R.). No data was available broken down by gender and country of origin.

Saudi Arabia is a top place of origin of international students with only India, South Korea, Canada, Taiwan, and Japan having greater numbers (Institute of International Education, 2010a). With almost 16,000 of their students studying abroad in the U.S. alone, Saudi Arabia clearly has the highest numbers of international students from the Arab world. Saudi Arabia, the

U.A.E., and Kuwait are of those countries privileged with wealth through oil (Hammond, 2005b), and this could explain the far greater numbers of international students from those countries moving to live and study in the U.S. The primary source of funding for international students was listed as personal and family; thus, students from wealthier families may have greater opportunities to study abroad. In addition, Saudi Arabia politically has a history as a strong U.S. ally in this region. This contributes to the ease in which student visas may be obtained.

There are a variety of plausible explanations for the fewer numbers of international students from other countries in the Arab world. One explanation to highlight is that only a select few countries are privileged with wealth through oil, and much of the region remains stricken with poverty and war (Hammond, 2005b). Arab countries that are in the top ten oil producers of the world include the five Gulf States of Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., Kuwait, Iraq, and Qatar. Although the Middle East is rich with this natural resource of oil, many of the countries have not benefited economically from this natural resource (Stevens, 2005). This has been termed the "resource curse" (Stevens, p. 423). The curse is that the Middle East has played a major role in the development of the international oil industry, but too many of the countries there remain plagued with war. Students who are refugees from these countries typically obtain a different visa status, and are not included in the numbers for international students.

To reiterate, the numbers in the paragraphs above pertain only to international students. Women from countries in the Arab world may or may not even be classified as an international student. This is due to the fact that women may also be studying in the U.S. with other visas that do not classify them in their university as an international student. To further confound the matter, they may or may not be a Muslim or an Arabic speaker. The numbers collected do not

specify whether each of those international students is Muslim or an Arabic speaker. Arabic speaking Muslim women who are new or recent immigrants to the U.S. and studying in higher education are not fully represented by the international student statistics.

A majority of students who are immigrants will have the F-1 visa, or the academic student visa, and be classified by an institute of higher education as an international student. A small majority will have other types of visas. Indeed, 5.6% of international students in the 2009/2010 academic year had a J-1 visa, or the exchange visitor's visa. The J-1 visa is typically seen with research scholars or visiting professors whose education is being funded by an outside source, such as their government. The remainder 5.8% had another type of visa that was not specified in the data, which could include the M-1, or vocational student visa (Institute of International Education, 2010b). Again, other types of students who are immigrants and studying in the U.S. may be refugees. They may also be married to a refugee or U.S. citizen. They may be a U.S. citizen themselves, who was born in the U.S., but lived abroad with their family. Arabic speaking Muslim women who are immigrants from the Arab world and are studying in the U.S. may hold various classifications of a visa or green card. Therefore, they may never be classified or identified as an international student.

As evidenced with the above explanations, students who are Arabic speaking, Muslim women immigrants from countries in the Arab world may or may not be included in the literature and statistics on Arab international students. This population of interest is a very limited, unique, and specific population that can be described under multiple titles and categorizations in research reviews. Hence, the importance of clarifying terminology and descriptors so the reader is well informed of the multiple categorizations that members of this group may be placed into. This provides a framework for a deeper understanding of this unique group experience.

Media and Public Image

A picture of what life may be like for the Arabic speaking, Muslim, woman who has moved, for one reason or another, from the Arab world to live and study in the U.S. is being provided. Transition is the movement from country of origin to country of migration. Adjustment is the subsequent meaning making that occurs following this transition. To understand the transition and adjustment experiences of these women, it is essential to understand the context and environment from which these women have moved, as well as the context and environment of the country they have moved to.

There is a small number of Arab Muslims living in the U.S. As explained in detail in the section on Population Statistics, the best current estimates are approximately 3 million individuals who identify as both Arab and Muslim living in the U.S. (Arab American Institute Foundation 2012; Zogby International, 2000). Compared to a U.S. population of over 300 million, this just barely reaches one percent. There is an even smaller and seemingly insignificant number of Arab Muslim university students living in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2010c). This number barely reaches even a tenth of a percent.

However, Islam is the fastest growing faith in the world with more than one and a half billion followers worldwide and growing (Esposito, 2013; DeSilver, 2013). This is more than 20% of the world population. Media attention received by Arab or Muslim immigrants to the U.S. may be in part due to the growing numbers of followers to this faith. In addition, there is a significant history with the U.S. in the Middle East and Arab world. This history has been characterized by war and political strife. Widely publicized in the media and popular press were the Gulf War, Palestinian-Israeli Wars, Israeli Invasions of Lebanon, 9/11, Iraq War, War on Terror, Egyptian Revolution, and Syrian War.

Likely for these reasons, Western media has focused on Islam in the Arab World. Although, the reality is that more than 60% of the world Muslim population is in Asia. This is the Asia-Pacific region. Not regions of Asia that are considered part of the Middle East. Indonesia and India are the countries with the two highest populations of Muslims in the world, each with about two hundred million.

American Image of Arab World

The image some Americans have of the Arab world, Arabs, and Muslims has been described using language such as, "strategic, region, desert, oil, Third World, dictatorship (i.e. no democracy), enemies of Israel, anti-Jewish, violent and terroristic, fatalistic and backward, immoral, liars, cheats, unreliable, indolent, licentious, sex fiends, exploiters and victimizers of women – and a threat to the West, to Christianity and to Western civilization" (Suleiman, 1999, p. 44). Of course, although it is implicit, "Americans" are assumed to be non-Muslim, non-Arab, and possibly non-ethnic. In other words, the term American, when used in much of the literature is seen as separate and independent from Islam, Muslims, and Arabs. Arab as an integral ethnic group to American society, and Islam as a major or predominant religion associated with America, is yet to be actualized. Stated frankly, "Islam is the aspect of Arabness people now want to know about, criticize, and understand" (Shyrock, 2002, p. 921).

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 (September 11, 2001) brought the U.S. into a state of defense. Parts of the Middle East were coined the Axis of Evil. The attacks of 9/11 were alleged to be committed in the name of Islam. Esposito (2002) called this the *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*. The War on Terror is a Western slogan. This terminology may have served as a political and martial defense. The American public was looking for explanations. There was a bombardment of media images and campaigns that provided the explanation that Muslims hated

the West, wanted to kill non-Muslims, and wanted to spread Islam by force. Public opinion polls and the media revealed frightening views that Americans felt Arabs and Muslims should have to carry special ID badges (Cainker, 2002). Public opinion was that Arabs and Muslims should not be immigrating to the U.S. anymore, and that Islamic teachings were the root causes behind acts of terrorism.

These media images and campaigns, although misleading and driven by fear, were also, in essence, an attempt to explain the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Cainker 2002; 2004; Esposito, 2002). To explain why attacks on U.S. civilians, or acts of terror, were claimed to be committed in the name of Islam. Causation of wars and violence carried out in the name of religion or country should not be freely or easily associated with the religion or country in question. As a reminder, the teachings of the monotheistic faiths are divine; however, the humans who follow these faiths are just that, humans with free will. Terror in the name of any faith has been condemned by each respective faith. Islam teaches that there are laws and morals to be upheld in the practice of justice and self-defense (*Qur'an,* 5:32, 6:151). Islam also teaches that there is no compulsion in religion. A scholarly approach to reading Qur'an is encouraged, especially for those who may be unfamiliar with both the historical context of the revelations and the interpretation of the meaning of revelations (Ernst, 2011).

The idea of religious war or holy war is centuries old. There were many wars carried out to both prevent and to support the spread of Judaism and Christianity. Historically, Christianity surpassed Judaism in numbers of followers. There is much fear in the West regarding the spread and teaching of Qur'an (Ernst, 2011). There has been a consistently expressed fear represented by media in the West that Islam will surpass Christianity in numbers of followers. Indeed, Islam teaches that before the Day of Judgment arrives in this worldly life, the numbers of Muslims will

increase to be greater than that of any other faith. Of importance to recall is that the growth rate of new Muslims entering Islam is higher to that of any other religion (Esposito, 2013). The fears expressed in the media are driven by history and statistics, as well knowledge of the teachings of Islam.

Arab Image of American World

The image that Muslims and Arabs living in the Middle East have of America is most influenced by U.S. foreign policies (Zogby, 2002). When asked, "What can the United Stated do to improve its relations with the Arab world?" almost four thousand Arabs living in Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Egypt, and Israel responded (Zogby, p. 83). Common responses related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The responses were to stop the suffering and murdering of Palestinians, to cut ties and the bias towards Israel, and to help form an independent land for Palestine. Many also hold the U.S. responsible for poverty, destruction, and death as a result of the wars in Iraq and Syria.

The lack of political reform and stability in the Middle East has contributed to the lack of economic growth and development needed to address poverty. The history of involvement of the U.S. military has been controversial to say the least (Lockman, 2004). The invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq in 2003 left a, "disconnect between vision and reality, between policy and consequence," that has, "frequently characterized America's involvement with the Middle East over the past half century" (Lockman, p.268). The difficulties seen in the rebuilding of Iraq following the United States occupation are representative of the economic and political strife that plagues the region.

A popular theory of why Arab societies are economically underdeveloped is that, "Western countries, especially the United States, have intentionally held Arab economies down"

(Sowell, 2004, p. 245). This sentiment is no doubt derived from the hardship and suffering endured by the people of the Arab world. Just as Americans were seeking answers and looking to Islam to explain terrorist attacks on civilians in America, Arabs and Muslims were also seeking answers and looking to the U.S. to explain high death tolls from seemingly unjustifiable attacks on civilians in the Arab world. Feelings of being treated as less than human in the media were common. This likely underpins some of the angst perceived towards the Western world.

American foreign policy, political strife, and decades of war have all clearly played a role in the Arab world's view of the U.S. (Lockman, 2004; Sowell, 2004; Zogby, 2002). Ethnic and religious discrimination towards those perceived to be Arab or Muslim have also played a major role in the image Arabs and Muslims have of America (Erickson and Al-Timimi, 2001). The terms racism and racial discrimination are often used interchangeably in the literature; however, Arab or Middle Eastern is typically denied as a racial category. Further, racism is typically recognized as negative beliefs and biases only towards the non-majority racial group.

Applications for employment or education instruct those from countries in the Arab world and the Middle East to list their racial category as White/Caucasian. This process clearly denies students from these countries of any sources of minority scholarships or funding. This impact is great on the image formed by Arabs towards the American world, as well as the transition and adjustment process to life and study in the U.S. for an immigrant from the Arab world. American and Arab remain distinct, yet Arabs are instructed to identify as a member of the majority racial group in America. As questioned by an Arab American, "How can I be American when that means supporting the killing of my people, justified by denigrating my ethnic identity?" (Cainker, 2002, p. 3).

Discrimination Towards Arabs and Muslims

For so many reasons described earlier, Western media has been focused on Islam in the Arab world. The images of Islam and America have been distinct. The images of Arab and American have been distinct. That is, the public image of Arabs and Muslims has yet to be that of a typical White American, and yet Arabs are instructed to list their racial category as White. Islam is not widely seen as a religion of the White majority. There has been a clear trend, influenced strongly by the media, of fear of Islam in America.

This fear of Islam seems to heighten following tragedies and acts of terror committed or perceived to be committed by Arabs and/or Muslims (Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2002; Arab American Institute Foundation, 2002; Cainker, 2002; 2004). When the origins or identification of suspected or arrested criminals is reported to be Arab, Middle Eastern, or Muslim, an immediate backlash is seen. Numerous reports of violence are received by civil rights organizations shortly after the release of the information that alleged or suspected criminals are Muslim. Some special attention should be given to the tragedy of 9/11, and the unfortunate resulting aftermath and backlash towards Arabs and Muslims. A dramatic increase was seen in hate crimes towards anyone perceived to be Muslim or of Arab descent.

Arabs and Muslims living in or migrating to the U.S. were considered somewhat invisible in the media prior to 9/11 (Cainker, 2002). Little was broadcasted in the media or written in the popular press about Islam or Arabs in America. Any media attention was focused on politics and war in the Arab world. The drastic change post 9/11 was characterized by a media overload of images of individuals living in or visiting the U.S. with tanned skin, beards, turbans, and Islamic dress. This accompanied requests for the American public to seek out and report any suspicious

behavior and any suspected involvement in terrorism. South Asians and Indians were often targeted mistakenly, being misperceived to be Arab.

Discrimination Reports

"The violence, discrimination, defamation and intolerance now faced by Arabs in American society has reached a level unparalleled in their over 100-year history in the US" (Cainker, 2002, p.1). Immediately following the collapse of the World Trade Center, reports of racially based aggression against those perceived to be of Middle Eastern background began to be reported (Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2002). The largest Arab Chicago mosque was targeted the very next day (Cainker). White protesters shouted, "kill the Arabs" and some had weapons. Women were spit at and scarves were torn off their heads. That is, their hijab was desecrated and forcibly removed from their bodies. To protect Muslims, police asked them to not to pray in the mosque and to close private Islamic schools. The schools remained closed for a week, but Muslims continued to attend prayers.

Reported statistics may clarify the gravity of the situation in the days and months following 9/11 (Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2002). In just a little over two months after 9/11, the attacks described above at the Arab Chicago mosque were becoming more and more frequent. Physical attacks were on individuals, as well as attacks on mosques and Muslim communities. Not surprising is that women wearing hijab were the most unmistakably identifiable and most vulnerable to attack. There were 700 violent incidents reported where the victim was targeted for being Arab or Muslim, or just being perceived to be Arab or Muslim. These reports included murders.

Over time, many crimes and violent incidents were called into question as to whether or not they were hate crimes. For example, many years after 9/11, a gas chemical was released into

a mosque and a young female refugee from Iraq was sprayed in the eyes there with chemicals (Sullivan, 2008; Wynn, 2008). The timing of this incident occurred during prayers in the month of Ramadan. The fire department provided inconclusive information and stated they treated the Muslims for trouble breathing and burning eyes. Law enforcement was quoted as stating these events were unrelated to religious or ethnic discrimination, thus with limited information publicly disclosed, the perpetrators and intent of the crime were unclear. Statements such as, "there is no indication that the incident was the result of a hate crime" and so and so, "was not the victim of a hate crime," were heard in Arab and Muslim communities (Wynn, p.1).

Police and FBI conduct, as well as government measures, were questioned during the months and years after 9/11 (Cainker, 2004). Acts of discrimination towards Arabs and Muslims were minimized. The validity of prosecution as a hate crime was commonly questioned. Profiling and intolerance were justified by the need for a safe America and winning the War on Terror. Unannounced visits from the FBI at people's places of employment and homes were common (Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2002). An unannounced visit from the FBI for an Arab or Muslim provoked fear, because their tactics were justified by the need for homeland security. Mass arrests, seizing property, wiretaps, deportation, secret evidence that was not available for questioning, and loss of attorney-client privilege were a part of the Arab and Muslim experience.

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, immigration issues started to receive massive attention in print, electronic media, public policy, and public debate. This led to a drastic movement towards revising and enforcing immigration rules more than any other time before. From 2001 through 2003, the number of deportation orders from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for immigrants from 24 predominantly Muslim countries increased by 31.4%,

while the increase of deportation orders for immigrants from other countries was only 3.4 % (Kayyali, 2006d). This could explain the lack of increase seen in the population of Arab and Middle Eastern Muslims in the U.S. over the past ten years or so.

Since 2003, any male over the age of 16 that had immigrated to the U.S. from many of the Muslim and/or Arabic speaking countries was required to report to USCIS each year for photographs and fingerprints (Kayyali, 2006d). These countries were Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Nineteen of these twenty-five countries are members of the Arab League, and are predominantly Muslim countries. The only non-Muslim country that held similar requirements by USCIS was North Korea.

The term, "flying while Arab" was coined as a satirical relief for the group experience of those who were Muslim or of Arab descent. This stemmed from the term, "driving while Black," which refers to discriminatory practices of law enforcement targeting African Americans in the U.S. Arabs and Muslims identified similar discriminatory practices being used when the experience of fear of flying became common. The fear was due to such frequently reported experiences by Arabs and Muslims during air travel of being harassed by security, being removed from an aircraft after boarding, being listed on "no fly" lists, and being detained without disclosure ((Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2002; Cainker 2002; 2004). That is, Arabs or Muslims could be detained for hours or days without the ability to disclose to their families or loved ones where they were. For females wearing hijab, there were not any protections in place for them not to be forced to have their hijab removed publically if they required traveling.

The hijab as a source of discrimination is a complex issue. As with all acts of discrimination, a direct link to causation is not always clear to the observer or to the individual. Many Muslim women have shared experiences of being threatened, insulted, and spit at (Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2002; Cainker, 2002; Smith, 2010a). Experiences with denial of services, housing discrimination, discrimination in hiring practices, and discrimination affecting job retention and promotion were too common. There are some well known legal cases among the North American Muslim community for individual women who sued large companies such as Disney and Abercrombie and Fitch for refusal to hire a Muslim woman wearing hijab and directly stating it was due to her hijab, or style or dress, being incompatible with their desired employee image.

A trend of discrimination in academic and education sectors was seen after 9/11 (Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2002). Arab and Muslim students were physically attacked in schools and on college and university campuses. They received death threats. Discrimination was overt, and not only by their peers. Faculty, staff, and administration publically harassed Arab and Muslim students. Ethnic and religious discrimination was seen as acceptable in order to protect the American public, value system, and way of life. Certain European countries have banned women from wearing hijab in the public school systems and government employment. Some other European countries and parts of North American are still debating on where and when to ban specific Islamic practices in the public sector.

The stated goal of practices of discrimination towards Arabs and Muslims was to protect America. Again, American and Arab or Muslim was very much seen as distinct. Americans were told they needed to be aware of the greatest threat to their ideals, values, and country...Islam. Campaigns were launched to turn people against Islam and vilify the Prophet Muhammad (may

the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions (Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2002; *ADC Establishes Voter Protection Unit,* 2008; Sullivan, 2008; Ernst, 2011). These campaigns were funded by leaders of the evangelical Christian right beginning in the months after 9/11. Examples are mass distributions and paid advertisements in newspapers warning the general public about radical Islam. There was an overall effort to incite fear in all things related to Islam. Public Qur'an burnings were held. Attempts continue to be made to destroy Qur'an copies, limit or stop distribution of Qur'an, and limit or stop teaching of Qur'an in schools and universities. Scare tactics were even used to discourage voters from voting for President Barack Obama due to his questioned Muslim heritage.

Being called a Muslim became associated with being insulted. Although reports provide information on acts of discrimination towards Arabs and Muslims that have been documented (hate crimes, profiling in airports, stricter immigration policies, etc.), few studies have scientifically researched the beliefs and attitudes that may be underlying the acts. In a study conducted four years after 9/11, Christians completed self-report measures of explicit attitudes, or those in conscious awareness, and implicit attitudes, or those not readily in conscious awareness (Rowatt, Franklin, & Cotton, 2005). Christians in this study were predominantly female college students, European American, Protestant, and from the southwestern region of the U.S. An implicit prejudice was found towards Muslims. Implicit attitudes were measured through reaction times. Participants were asked to place Christian or Muslim names and pleasant or unpleasant adjectives in categories. The reaction times to associate Muslim names with unpleasant adjectives were shorter, and their times were longer when associating names with

pleasant adjectives. Both explicit and implicit attitudes towards Christians were more positive than towards Muslims. A Muslim was associated with something negative and unpleasant.

Anti-Muslim sentiments, anti-Arab prejudice, and Islamophobia existed long before 9/11. In a study conducted nine years prior to 9/11, 418 people were randomly surveyed in Muncie, Indiana using telephone interviews (Johnson, 1992). Low education and perceiving Arabs as an economic threat contributed to anti-Arab prejudice. There also appeared to be stronger anti-Arab prejudice among Protestants than Catholics. Although there is no doubt that acts of ethnic discrimination have occurred towards Arabs, this study illustrates the potential causes or beliefs that may underlie these acts. In this case, lack of education or limited knowledge about Arabs, as well as a sense of economic fear associated with Arabs.

As shown through the media and scholarly research, there exists a set of negative attitudes and beliefs about Arabs and Muslims. These attitudes and beliefs are associated with acts of discrimination towards Arabs and Muslims. These attitudes and beliefs also impact the Arab and Muslim experience in the U.S. Once again, murder, hate crimes, acts of violence, death threats, removal from aircrafts, employment discrimination, denials of service, housing discrimination, and academic discrimination peaked after 9/11 (Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2002). Incidents of discrimination based on perceived religion, race, or ethnicity continue to be reported over time. The number of incidents that went unreported is obviously unknown. Considering a best population estimate of three million Arab Muslims living in the U.S. (Zogby International, 2000), the crime and discrimination statistics are truly troubling.

Many of the statistics above were those reported in the time period following 9/11. Arabs and Muslims became very concerned about profiling, intolerance, and the long-term effects of

discrimination after 9/11 (U.S. Department of State, 2001). The great concern was that immediately after 9/11 and in the years to follow, discriminatory treatment and practices were justified and supported by the general public in the name of protecting the homeland. It was estimated that by three years after 9/11, at least 100,000 Arabs and Muslims living in the U.S. had experienced some sort of discriminatory treatment from the FBI (Cainker, 2004).

Impact on Migration

Immigrants coming to the U.S. may have high hopes of beginning a new life in a safe environment. As discussed earlier in the section on Immigrant Demographics, there are many motivators and factors that may be involved in the decision to move to live and study in the U.S. from a country in the Arab world (Martin, 2013). They may have already experienced extreme hardships prior to their move and be in need of a new permanent or semi-permanent residence. Their move may or may not have been voluntary. Poverty, oppression, and war in the Arab world are just some of the factors that may be involved in the motivation to move. Those hopes of finding safety, security, and prosperity in a new land may or may not be actualized.

The process of migrating to the U.S. for education is unique for immigrants from the Arab world. The process of transition and adjustment to live and study in a new country includes dealing with barriers and challenges faced by many immigrants (Betz, 2004; Hum & Simpson, 2003; Kadkhoda, 2002). In addition to the barriers and challenges faced by most immigrants, religious and ethnic discrimination are an added hardship of migration for the Arabic speaking Muslim woman. Immigrants are already challenged with obtaining visas in time for university program start dates and obtaining visas for spouses. Locating and obtaining financial funding to support education costs and living expenses is often a stressor. Not being allowed to work off-campus for the immigrant or their spouse due to student visa regulations is a hindrance.

Immigrants may enter the country with a hope to expedite their already established careers and with strong beliefs about their abilities to succeed in new careers. Contrary to their expectations, immigrants typically encounter barriers of language, poor social support systems, lack of credentials, and lack of job-related experiences.

There is an environment of public concerns that impacts the transition and adjustment process of immigrants. The media and public image play a role in the ability and ease of migration. Public opinion is attached to immigration policy issues and laws. Negative publicity and negative public images contribute to the development and support of harsher immigration laws. As previously mentioned, the number of deportation orders issued in the months after 9/11 from immigrants from the Arab world were unparalleled to almost any other country (Kayyali, 2006d). These law changes are directly affecting immigrants and their transition process, in particular their ability and ease to travel and migrate. Legislations concerning immigration have been strict. Illegal immigration is a felony and those who aid illegal immigrants face criminal charges (Martin & Midgley, 2006). Changes in immigration laws are an example of the growing concern that the American public has when there is a noticeable influx of immigrants.

The general American population has historically expressed concerns over the increasing size and characteristics of the immigrant population (Martin & Midgley, 2006). This is despite the fact that many major cities in the U.S. depend upon the employment of immigrants, particularly Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City. Even so, public concerns are widely voiced that: a) immigration contributes to environmental problems related to population growth, b) immigrants compete with American born citizens for work, c) the willingness of immigrants to work for lower wages has diminished U.S. competitiveness in the world economy, and d) Hispanic and Asian immigrants have changed the U.S. demographics so greatly that issues of

language in public schools and preference in university admissions, job opportunities, and business contracts have arisen (Martin & Midgley, p. 11).

One of the greatest barriers immigrants do not typically expect to encounter is this experience of discrimination, as well as the American public image and opinion of immigrants. The media, the public image, and the awareness of discrimination all play a role in the decisions immigrants make to study abroad. They also play a role in their transition and adjustment experiences. When minorities begin to explore what it means to be part of their ethnic group, they deal with learning about the history of their group's experiences with prejudice and discrimination (Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2000).

Discrimination impacts Arab and Muslim experiences living in and choices in adjusting to life in the U.S. (Zogby, 2002; Erickson and Al-Timimi, 2001). Decisions to move the U.S. are influenced by the situation in their country of origin. Decisions to stay in the U.S. are influenced by the increasing awareness they gain that being Arab and Muslim may not only be less accepted, but may potentially be a threat to their physical safety. Recognitions and awareness of discrimination may not likely be made until they have experienced it themselves. Again, the statistics discussed in the Discrimination Reports section are not widely distributed. Neither print nor broadcast media has highlighted the reactionary profiling and violence that occurs.

Reaction to Discrimination

Hussein Ibish, communications director for the Arab-American Anti Discrimination Committee, said, "…communities are now more worried about how they are perceived by their fellow citizens, and whether issues such as immigration and employment discrimination, or defamatory statements against the Islamic faith by several prominent American Christian leaders will be tolerated by the wider American public" (U.S. Department of State, 2001). The aftermath

of 9/11 produced various reactions from Arab Americans. Some reacted by, "distancing themselves from their heritage," and others, "felt a large responsibility to educate others about their culture and about the Arab world" (Kayyali, 2006c, p.144).

Arab and Muslim Americans have been given the responsibility of not only explaining the terrorist attacks of 9/11, but also of explaining to the world in general about Islam, Muslims, the Middle East and the Arab World, and why Islam is associated with terrorism (Smith, 2010b). A vast majority of the literature and scholarly works continue to identify the attacks of 9/11 as an extreme form of Islam, but still as part of Islam. Radical Islam and Islamophobia were fashioned terms. The idea was shaped that there was some subsection of Islam, which condoned extremists or radicals terrorizing the West. The affect was worldwide, and not only in the U.S. Arab and Muslim economies, tourism, study abroad, and travel in general to the Arab world are stunted when there is a tragedy associated with an Arab or Muslim.

While there are those who are still expressing concerns about the numbers of immigrants entering the U.S. and the increase in numbers of followers of Islam, there are also those who are adamantly working to fight for immigrant rights and welfare and to educate the American public about Islam. Arab American and Muslim organizations have reacted by being active in providing support to Arab American and Muslim communities and in providing education to others about Arabs and Muslims. Arab American and Muslim American organizations provide services and education to fight discrimination and immigration issues and policies.

National organizations establish local chapters and connect Arabs and Muslim for a common cause of promoting peace and fighting for civil rights. These include, but are not limited to the Arab-American Anti Discrimination Committee (www.adc.org), Islamic Society of North America (www.isna.net), Council on American-Islamic Relations (www.cair.com), and

Muslim Student Association (msanational.org). Muslim women are taking on leadership roles in organizations such as the Islamic Society of North America. Organizations specifically for Muslim women are just beginning to be developed and become established across North America.

The result of the defamation attempts of Islam was to cause Muslim groups to unite, rally, and educate (Smith, 2010b). The American Arab and Muslim communities are using media outlets to admonish the notion that Islam promotes or condones any acts of terrorism. Islam is being taught as a part of America, not some foreign-born force any longer. The negative image of Muslims is attempting to be changed through media advertisements promoting Muslim Americans. The hopes for increased visibility of Muslim Americans are greater acceptance of Islam and reduced global conflict.

Muslim women in the West are making efforts for their voices to be heard (Smith, 2010a). They are speaking out about the practice of their faith. They are making contributions in literature, broadcasting, business, medicine, psychology, and many other domains. Indeed, this dissertation research is an effort to reach out through promoting education and dialogue. By giving voice to the experiences of Arabic speaking, Muslim women transitioning and adjusting to life in the U.S., these experiences no longer remain estranged and silent.

Transition and Adjustment of Arab Muslim Women

Religious, spiritual, social, academic, and political issues that may impact the Arabic speaking, Muslim woman experience living and studying in the U.S. have been touched on. Islam, Qur'an, Muslim, Arab, Middle East, and Arab world are now part of the vocabulary. Demographics and statistics of Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. and in higher education have been discussed in detail. An overview has been given of the history of conflict with the Arab world.

The challenges Arabs and Muslims in the American world face have been raised. The impacts of these challenges on migration and the community responses to discrimination have been shared. The experience of an Arab Muslim woman transitioning and adjusting to life in the U.S. will be discussed in further detail.

Literature Base

In the following sections, modern literature, academic literature, and scientific research that have focused on the ethnic minority, immigrant, Arab, and Muslim woman experience will be reviewed. Biographies and autobiographies offer wonderful sources of rich shared experiences. Scientific literature on this topic includes academic books, research articles, and a handful of dissertation research emerging that focuses on Arab Muslim women acculturation and identity experiences.

Several accounts of American Muslim life have been shared by female authors (Abdul-Ghafur, 2005; Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006; Hassan, 2000; Shakir, 1997). These females were not immigrants themselves or raised in the Arab world, but their parents were. The authorship and leadership in literature of these women is noteworthy. *American Muslims: The new generation* gives a nice overview of American Muslim life (Hassan, 2000). Asma shares her struggles and hopes as a 25-year-old American-born Muslim woman. Her experience was such that she felt Westerners did not seem to understand hijab. As a non-veiled Muslim woman, she shared her experiences hearing others negative remarks about women wearing hijab.

Living Islam out loud: American Muslim women speak is a compilation of first person stories by Muslim women sharing their experiences (Abdul-Ghafur, 2005). Women speak out about hijab, family, romantic relationships, and social activism. *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American women in the United States* explores the generational differences among immigrant

parents and their U.S. born or raised children (Shakir, 1997). *Muslim Women in America: The challenge of Islamic identity today* is a discourse about the rights of women in Islam, such as those of education, business, and marriage (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006). The chapter on Competing Discourses (pp. 143-164) illustrates competing views in the literature written by women about the rights of women in Islam.

With the increasing recognition that Muslims are the fastest growing faith population in the world (Esposito, 2013; DeSilver, 2013), has come increasing attention to teaching how to counsel Muslims. *Counseling Muslims: A Handbook of Mental Health Issues and Interventions* discusses models and interventions in counseling with Muslims (Ahmed & Amer, 2012). Examples of Islamic beliefs infused with the therapy process are provided. Encouragement is given to clinicians to learn about gender equity in Islam. Misconceptions about the role of religion in domestic violence are discussed. The book does not, however, focus on women in Islam or issues of acculturation and identity.

Counseling and Psychotherapy with Arabs and Muslims: A Culturally Sensitive Approach goes into some depth on women's issues and immigrant issues in counseling (Dwairy, 2006). Clinicians are asked to evaluate whether clients are more "Western" or more "Arab/Muslim." Recognition is increasing that the client's level of acculturation greatly impacts the therapy dynamics; however, the either-or mentality is still present – either they are more Western or more Arab/Muslim. Further, what is considered Western vs. Arab vs. Muslim is a not clearly defined and likely cannot be in this way. The *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* also began print in 2006 to highlight work with Muslims in the therapy context.

Therapists are encouraged to start paying attention to the transitional experiences that Muslims are having (Sauerheber, Nims, & Carter, 2014). Consideration is being given on just

how integral the transition and adjustment experience is to every area of life, including relationships, family, religious practices, academics, and the world of work. Attention is to be given to differing levels of acculturation between first, second, and even third generation family members. Within this group though, predominantly first and second generation to the U.S. is most common. Recalling the section on Arab Muslim Immigrants, this is consistent. This is consistent with the history of immigration from the Arab world to the American world, and with the three waves of immigration to the U.S. that started in the late 1800s (Orfalea, 2006).

Incorporating experiences of acculturation in the therapy process is by far not a new concept. Models based on research and theory to train therapists working with immigrant Arab Muslim Women are difficult to find. Training on how to address transition and adjustment experiences for immigrant Muslim women from the Arab world in counseling practice is needed. The literature base is sparse. This dissertation study attempts to increase such discourse and to provide a guide for future studies.

Acculturation

There is a body of literature that has described experiences of transition and adjustment through the lens of acculturation. There are a fair amount of quantitative studies on acculturation. There are limited qualitative studies that were found on transition and adjustment experiences of Arab and Muslim women. The bulk of the research has explored acculturation as a stage or categorical processes of development. Studies on the lived experiences of transition and adjustment as a continuum over time are sparse. Acculturation is often researched as categories, and these categorical groupings often have high overlaps in meaning and unclear distinctions.

Acculturation refers to the way groups and/or individuals adjust or adapt to new cultures. Acculturation is a process of cultural contact that occurs on a group level and on an individual

level. Culture refers to "belief systems, behaviors, and traditions," that people use to "preserve society and meet a range of human needs" (Robinson, 2005, p. 7-8). Acculturation literature focuses on the process of adjusting to the majority culture.

On the group, macro, or societal level, the term acculturation was earliest described as, "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals sharing different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield, Linton, Hersekovits, 1936; p. 149). This definition has been widely used and cited in the acculturation literature (Berry, 1997; Berry, 2001; Berry, 2005). On the group level, cultures coming into continuous contact with one another end up with significant changes in both cultures.

Acculturation has been most used in the psychological literature to describe what occurs at the individual, or micro, level when an ethnic minority group member is adjusting to the majority culture. Levels, or categories, of individual acculturation have been suggested (Berry, 1997; Berry, 2001; Berry, 2005). These are integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 1997). Two questions may be used to determine which category an individual is in. These are, "Is it considered to be of value to maintain one's cultural heritage?" and "Is it considered to be of value to develop relationships with the larger society?" Answering "yes" to both defines integration, while "no" to both defines marginalization. Separation occurs with a response of "yes" to the first question, and "no" to the second, while assimilation yields a response of "no," then "yes."

Immigrants form attitudes about acculturation. These attitudes form when they are faced with addressing two issues called intercultural contact and cultural maintenance (Berry, 2001). Intercultural contact is contact with majority group members or anyone from a different culture

than their own. Immigrants must question the extent of contact they want to engage in with the majority group, and their decision on how much they want to engage with others forms their attitudes towards intercultural contact. Cultural maintenance is the importance of maintaining their ethnic culture within the new culture. Immigrants must question the extent of importance in preserving their ethnic culture, and this forms their attitude toward cultural maintenance.

The strength of the individual's identification with the majority and/or ethnic group further defines the four categories of acculturation (Berry, 1997). Strong identification with both the majority group and the ethnic group leads to the integration status, which is often used synonymously with the term, "bicultural." Strong identification with the majority group and weak identification with the ethnic group leads to the assimilation category, where the minority has rejected their ethnic culture. Weak identification with the majority group and strong identification to the ethnic group leads to separation, where the minority rejects the majority culture. Weak identification with both the majority and minority group leads to the last status, marginalization, where the minority does not feel they participate in either culture. Separation and assimilation were found as common choices when minorities did not feel free to keep their own culture while entering the majority culture (Phinney, Horenczyk, Leibkind, & Vedder, 2001).

Research on acculturation with Arabs and Muslims has focused on determining which of the four categories of acculturation that the individual is currently in. In a study on Arab Muslim acculturation, a measure was developed, the *Male Arab Acculturation Scale* (MAAS; Barry, 2005). Four statements comprise each of the two orthogonal and independent scales, the separation/assimilation scale and the integration/marginalization scale. Three statements are reverse scored, so that being high on each scale would represent the separation or integration

statuses, while a low score would indicate the assimilation or marginalization status. Responses were given on a likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree to the following eight statements (statuses represented given in parentheses):

I would much prefer to live in an Arab country (separation)

I mix equally well with Americans and Arabs (integration)

Most of my friends are Arabs (separation)

I am equally at ease socializing with Arabs and Americans (integration)

I behave like an American in many ways (assimilation)

I have many Arab and American friends (integration)

Generally, I feel more comfortable around Americans that I do Arabs (assimilation)

I have a lot of difficulty making friends (marginalization; Barry, 2005, p. 180).

As seen, many of the statements that decide whether an Arab is in the integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization status can have multiple interpretations and meanings. Just simply describing what is considered "American" behavior and what is considered "Arab" behavior in and of itself is problematic. As discussed in detail in the section on Arab, there is no single agreed upon grouping of countries that comprise the term Arab world, and there is no one definition for an Arab. Given these complexities, how so then could any scales that measure how Arab someone is be accurate? Further, American and Arab are viewed here as distinct and not overlapping. As discussed in the sections on Discrimination Towards Arabs and Muslims and Reaction to Discrimination, there is a strong movement to teach that Arab and American do not have to be separate. In addition, any applications to women should not be made on a scale first modified for use with men.

A focus group discussion was conducted with seven, foreign-born, adult, male Arab Muslims in Kalamazoo, Michigan (Hammoudah, 2006). Once again, applications to women on the basis of a study conducted with men are difficult to make; however, the implications of such studies are relevant to guide future research and support the need for additional qualitative studies. Men who participated in the focus group were recent immigrants (2 months to 2 years) from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Palestine, ages 19 to 29, and moved to the U.S. for education, employment, and/or family. To understand their experiences with acculturation, participants were asked to, "Talk to each other about what it has been like for you since you moved to the United States." and "Share what your experiences have been living in America." Results of data analysis revealed four themes that were a) understanding the differences between American culture and the ethnic culture, such as understanding what being an American means, identifying American values, and identifying how those are different from their ethnic values, b) important factors to consider in attitudes toward acculturation, such as reasons for moving, loyalty to country of origin, and expected length of stay, c) factors that make acculturation easier, such as having family already living in the United States and strong English language skills, and d) factors that make acculturation more difficult, such as not having friends and/or social support and feeling far away from home.

The integrated, marginalized, assimilated, or separated categories of acculturation, as identified by previous research (Berry 1997; 2001; Barry, 2005), were not directly measured; however, they were also not salient in participant responses to their transition experience (Hammoudah, 2006). The strength of the participants' identification with the majority group and/or their ethnic group did not appear to be a central focus or underlying theme. Understanding what it meant to be labeled as a member of a group (i.e. American, Arab, Egyptian, Saudi)

depending on context, what was important to consider when transitioning between groups in different settings, and what made this transition easier or more difficult were most evident in this study. The most salient finding was that these minority male Arab Muslim immigrants had to undergo a process of having to clarify or learn what is different about the American culture from their ethnic culture when acculturating. The process for recent immigrants, such as those in this study, may take a different form than for those who have been living in the U.S. for more than a few years. Indeed, understanding the cultural and environmental context in the U.S. may precede a commitment to an acculturative status or category.

The theory of selective acculturation is also of importance to discuss. Acculturation, thus far, has been described as a process with four emergent statuses. Selective acculturation describes a process that ethnic minorities undergo when adjusting their religiosity to the majority culture (Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Gans, 1994; Portes & Hao, 2002; Deng, Walker, & Swinnerton, 2006; Haller & Landolt, 2005). Selective acculturation is accomplished by selectively choosing which American values will be accepted that least interfere with religious beliefs, values, and practices. Selective acculturation attempts to explain how ethnic minority immigrants in the U.S. were able to adjust to the majority culture yet still retain and pass on their heritage. To do so meant accepting those behaviors and practices that would foster assimilation and retaining those behaviors and practices that would maintain their country of origin's culture. For Muslims, desirable retained behaviors, practices, and values were found to be the importance of family, expected roles of family members (father, mother, son, daughter), religious group participation (attending services and spending time with other Muslims), and desire for the separateness of all things Muslim and all things American (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006). The process of selective acculturation does not appear to be very different from any other previously described processes

of acculturation. Specifically, the only major shift appears to be the focus on religiosity in selectively acculturating for Muslims.

Methods of researching acculturation have been called into question in emerging dissertation research (Howe, 2013). The question of what exactly American Muslims are acculturating to was explored in a study with over 200 youth and adults in a Chicago suburb. What was considered "American" and what was considered "Muslim" still seemed somewhat separated in the study. Ways of dress and values appeared to be two areas that differed among Muslims from mainstream American society. Once again, recognitions are being made that Muslim communities are widely diverse and new methods of studying this population need to be implored.

Dissertation research has also sought to explore whether there are differences in acculturation among Arab American women based on their employment status (i.e. working or not working; Tuma Hanania, 2002). The Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans was modified for use with Arab women. Ninety-four women in Texas, California, Michigan, Ohio, or Kentucky that were a majority Christian took the scale. Differences between Christians and Muslims who took the scale were not found; however, the researcher also noted there was difficulty in recruiting Arab Muslim women to participate. This research found that Arab American women who were employed were more acculturated than those who were not. Many issues confounded these results, including any measurement or a baseline of how acculturated the women were to begin with prior to employment.

Current measures of acculturation, or modified measures of acculturation, do not capture what is occurring during the initial transition or adjustment process. Whether this be a transition and adjustment to a work environment outside the home, to a university environment, or to a new

country in addition to a new place of education or employment. This initial process of transition and adjustment may reflect more change than what is being measured after a significant amount of time has already passed.

Research is limited describing and understanding the transition and adjustment experiences of Muslim women who are immigrants from the Arab world and have migrated for the purpose of educational attainment in the U.S. This experience appears to be more of a continuum from initial transition and movement to subsequent adjustment and meaning making. Acculturation stages depend on an either-or mentality. The immigrant must constantly be making choices about which group to belong in and which group to reject. These forced dichotomies can be problematic and simplistic. Prior to any kind of identification with an acculturation status, the immigrant must have gone through a process to make some meaning of their experiences.

Once again, for the purposes of this study, transition is being defined as the movement from country of origin to country of migration. Adjustment is being defined as the subsequent meaning making that occurs following this transition. Synonyms for transition are shift, change, and move. Synonyms for adjustment are modification, tweaking, and fine-tuning. Transition and adjustment can be seen this way, with transitioning being the active moving and adjusting being the modification of understanding and fine-tuning of meaning making.

Identity

There is another body of literature that has described experiences of adjustment through the lens of identity development or ethnic identity development (Phinney, 1992; 1996). Identity literature focuses on developing a sense of self as an ethnic and religious minority. Ethnic identity has often been used interchangeably with religious belonging or racial belonging. Ethnic identity may also be conceptualized as a feeling of belonging and commitment to the group,

rather than simply adopting the practices of the group. This combination of attitudes towards one's group, attachment, and cultural practices can foster the psychological connection to people with a common place of origin and history. Ethnic identity is mostly seen as a continuous process. This process ranges from diffusion to achievement. A diffused ethnic identity is one in which there has been a lack of exploration by the individual and a lack of commitment to their ethnic group. An achieved ethnic identity is one in which the individual has explored many aspects of their minority group membership and committed to their ethnic group.

In order to share what it has been like to adjust to a new country as religious and ethnic minority, an individual must go through this process of identity development. Research on the process of developing a personal identity with Arab Muslims has focused primarily on ethnic identity and religious identity. Recognizing what it means to be a part of each of these minority groups and understanding how that may be similar or different from the majority seems to come first (Hammoudah, 2006). Understanding the similarities and differences between cultures is primary to understanding the experiences of Arab and Muslim women in the U.S. Differentiation also appears to be one of the first steps for the individual to begin defining their identity, or unique sense of self. Development of an ethnic identity may include recognition of ethnicity, or distinctive behavioral, organizational, and cultural characteristics that can result in differential treatment from others (Aguirre & Turner, 2001). Islam is going to be one of these distinct behavioral, organizational, and cultural characteristics for Arab and Muslim women.

Thus, religion is primary to discussing identity issues with Arab Muslims. For both immigrant and first generation Muslim women, religiosity was found to play a role in the development of their identity (Haque-Khan, 2014). Religious identity for Arab Muslims has also been described as either a simple personal religious belief or an ethnic identity in and of itself

(Fayek, 2004). Challenges have been discussed in terms of adopting a personal religious identity, which is freely chosen, rather than adopting an ethnic religious identity, which is not a matter of choice. The ethnic religious identity is not seen as a matter of choice because breaking away from the group identity is not seen as possible. Arab Muslim therapists have noted that in practice, "questioning religion turns to a defense against loss of identity" (Fayek, p. 452). The personal religious identity is seen as one that is freely chosen. This appears to be an explored identity. In this case, one may have internally embraced Islam, rather than one who performs activities and attends functions as simply a part of the existing social structure.

The *Male Arab Ethnic Identity Measure* (MAEIM) was developed using focus group interviews with Arab men (Barry, Elliott, & Evans, 2000). Semi-structured, taped interviews were conducted with 10 male Arab immigrant students. Participants were asked, "What is it like for an Arabic student to live in the United States?" Themes were extracted from their responses and questions for a measure were developed that addressed each of the themes. Two focus groups were formed and participants were asked to give feedback and suggestions on the themes and corresponding items. Religious and family values, sense of belonging/ethnic pride, friendship, and ethnic Arab practices were found to be most salient in measuring ethnic identity within this population. Religion is a part of the ethnic identity measurement for this group. Although the study focused on men, this overlapping of ethnic identity and religious identity is likely applicable to females as well.

The distinction between ethnic identity development and religious identity development for Arab Muslims is slight. Generalizations about this distinction may be difficult to make for the population of interest in this study, Muslim women immigrants from countries of origin in the Arab world. As both the ethnic and religious components are very salient. Women may choose to

take one or the other as primary, or take both as equally important identifications. Dr. Laila Al-Marayati, member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, stated, "I don't view myself through separate identities. The yardstick I measure by is my faith; everything else falls into place. My identity is an American Palestinian who is a Muslim" (U.S. Department of State, 2002c). Dr. Al-Marayati is embracing her religion as her primary identification and using the group identifications as secondary.

The *Bem Sex Role Inventory* (BSRI), the *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure* (MEIM), and a developed religion scale were given to 96 Muslim females, ages 13 to 18, from a private Islamic high school in the U.S. (Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999). The religion scale was developed by the authors and asked about Islamic rituals, practices, beliefs, and attitudes. Of some surprise was the finding that Muslim female adolescents had higher scores on the masculinity scale of the BSRI than were found in the normative samples of U.S. college women. Higher self-reports of masculine attributes were associated with Muslims who had lived in the U.S. longer. Although, Muslims who had a stronger sense of belonging to their ethnic group and greater adherence to and belief in Muslim practices reported more stereotypically feminine traits. These findings suggested that for young Muslim females, there may be a complex relationship among gender roles (stereotypically masculine or feminine traits), feelings of belonging to the group, and religion.

Ethnic identity does appear to develop differently between males and females in regard to religion. Ajrouch (2004) formed focus group discussions with second-generation Arab American adolescents living in Dearborn, Michigan. These focus group discussions revealed that religious teachings about Islam shaped identity formation differently for male and female adolescents. A high, or salient, ethnic identity and high religiosity was associated with more conservative sexual

attitudes for females, but not for males. An important limitation of this finding was the inability to control for, or know how much of, this finding was confounded by the socialization of males and females. Based on this study, it would appear that female youth who identify more strongly with Islamic beliefs and practices are also more vocal about traditional and modest views on sexual relations prior to marriage. Also based on this study, it would appear that male youth are not. Once again, many factors including comfort level discussing sexual attitudes in a group and the potential pressure for females to protect family reputation may be involved. Focus groups may be ideal for sharing experiences of transition and adjustment and receiving support, but not ideal for Arab Muslims to share personal attitudes about sex.

A dissertation study using both individual and group interviews explored impact of the negative media images of Islam and terrorism on the identity development of Arab American Muslims in St. Louis (Hager, 2012). Four American Muslim women with ancestry from Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Turkey were interviewed, and nine community interviews were done. The researcher confirmed that American Muslim women are maintaining close ties with family. Further, that negative media images and portrayals have driven Muslims to increase efforts to educate others about their beliefs and practices. These aspects appeared to shape identity development over time for the American Muslim women by empowering them.

In another very interesting dissertation study, 85 first and second generation immigrant Muslim women were interviewed in both the Netherlands and the U.S. (Ozyurt, 2013). Of the 50 women interviewed in the U.S., all were from Southern California and of Arab, Persian, or South Asian descent. The argument was made that the acculturation or identity status itself is not what is relevant. That what is relevant and most important is how the individual forms their narrative. Further, that the narrative includes experiences prior to and following the migration. Also, that

these experiences are shaped within the political, economical, and social context of the immigrant, but that style of dress (wearing hijab or not wearing hijab) does not have a significant impact. The narrative can be one in which the different cultures they belong in are mediated. This is similar to cultural switching, in which an individual who is seen as bicultural can switch back and forth between identities depending upon the group and context they are in at the time. Still, the premise is that the American culture and the Arab or Muslim culture is seen as separate, distinct. A hybrid or synthesized self is suggested as a term to describe a woman that successfully incorporates more than one or two identities. The talk and discourse is still regarding this identity or that identity, not encompassing the Muslim woman's experience as a whole.

There is much work to be done in this area of research, particularly on Muslim women studying at U.S. colleges and universities (Mir, 2014). Understanding the transition and adjustment experience for Muslim women who are immigrants from the Arab world and move to live and study in the U.S. will have many applications. Colleges and universities across the U.S. continuously work to improve international student programs. As discussed in the section on Higher Education Statistics, near to a million international students from across the globe come to study in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2010a). Institutes of higher education are lacking in their ability to provide comprehensive programming to facilitate social life and identity development for Muslim women (Mir). American Muslim women have shared that they experience this double-edged sword, in which they receive criticism from the Muslim minority group, as well as from the Christian majority group. This study reiterates how identity development is shaped within the context of one's environment. Although the women in this study were not immigrants and had been raised in the U.S., the applications to how they

navigated through campus life are important. Issues with typical activities of leisure on a college campus, including drinking, dating, and fashion were areas that these Muslim women had to navigate. The women in this study essentially sculpted their own environments on campus by finding safe places where they fit in and could be themselves.

There is overlap among acculturation statuses of immigrants to the U.S. and the ethnic identity statuses discussed for both immigrants and American born or raised Arab Muslims. Although the definitions and research varies, the terms and statuses are sometimes used interchangeably. In a chapter written on Muslim woman, factors similar as those appearing in the acculturation and identity literature were discussed (Hermansen. 1993). These were that Muslim women immigrants might have to decide on what parts of their ethnic and religious identity they are willing to display externally for others to see. Also, that the circumstances of the migration and the area of the U.S. where the women will be living are very important issues to consider. In close-knit Arab and Muslim communities, such as Dearborn, Michigan, the transition for women may be far less of a change by entering a predominantly Arabic speaking area with a majority of businesses owned by Arabs and Muslims. Business signs are posted in Arabic and Arabic speakers provide most goods and services. In such a subculture, there is less pressure to acculturate.

During an in depth case study with a young adult Iraqi male who was a recent immigrant, identity struggles included issues surrounding sex, family, and career (Georgia, 1998). Issues of torn identities as a Muslim and an American are raised. Beliefs in Islam and need to assimilate to the dominant U.S. culture are viewed as conflicting. The marginalized status, where the client may not feel he is participating fully in either culture is apparent. The dominant view is that in order to assimilate, the client would be giving up his commitment to his ethnic Iraqi culture. In

order to develop integration, or a bicultural status, the client would need to place equal value on the U.S. culture and his own Iraqi culture. Neither choice may truly explain the process that this client will undergo in his acculturative and/or ethnic identity development. In making applications for a female who is a young adult and recent immigrant, additional considerations should be explored surrounding clothing choice, reputation, and living situation.

The *Male Arab Acculturation Scale* (MAAS; previously discussed in detail in the Acculturation section), *Male Arab Ethnic Identity Measure* (MAEIM), *Self-Construal Scale* (SCS), *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (SES), and *Collective Self Esteem Measure* (CSE) were given to 115 male Arab immigrants ages 18 to 54 and living in the U.S. (Barry, 2005). A majority of the participants were Muslims (84%). Some important findings were that higher scores on the separation/assimilation scale were positively associated with ethnic identity overall (MAEIM) and the CSE. That is, separation from the majority culture was positively associated with the development of an Arab ethnic identity and collective self-esteem. Furthermore, higher scores on the integration/marginalization scale were not associated with the MEIM overall and negatively associated the MEIM subscale of ethnic Arabic practices. That is, being in the integration status was not found to be associated with the development of an ethnic identity and was actually negatively associated with Arab cultural practices. In other words, Arab males who socialized mostly with other Arabs developed stronger ethnic identities and had higher self-esteem. Once again, applications to females are made cautiously on measures developed for and provided to males. These findings, however, are contrary to many of the theories that an immigrant will be psychologically healthier, or experience less distress, by integrating cultures rather than simply maintaining their own culture of origin.

Acculturative Stress

There is, nonetheless, a certain amount of stress that seems to be inseparable from the process of transition and adjustment, which has just been described within the current literature as acculturation and identity development. When acculturation is described as a process on a continuum, the range given is from "harmony effectiveness" to "conflict and stress" (Berry, 2005, p. 699). Behavioral shifts, such as culture shedding and culture learning, lead to harmony and effectiveness. The conflict and stress end of this continuum refers to acculturative stress. This encompasses the stressors that immigrants experience as a result of the transition.

Acculturative stress refers to a high degree of culture conflict and stress. By definition, it is a, "stress reaction in response to life related to exposure events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation" (Berry, p. 708). Being in the integration category is seen as least stressful, marginalization is most stressful, and assimilation and separation are in the middle. Higher levels of acculturative stress were related to pre-migration trauma (such as war), family dysfunction, and ineffective social support (Hovey, 1999, p. 192). Lower levels of acculturative stress were related to being married, more frequent church attendance, and positive expectations for the future (Hovey, p. 192-193)

Measures of acculturation, acculturative stress, family functioning, social support, religious coping, anxiety, and depression were completed online for a dissertation study by 611 Arabs ages 18 to 81 and living in the U.S. (Amer, 2005). Approximately 60% of the participants were women, a majority (70%) was Muslim, and a minority (18%) was first generation immigrants. "Acculturation was conceptualized as the dynamic change process associated with interacting with a new culture" (Amer, p. 188). Acculturation was measured using the Vancouver Index of Acculturation- Modified Arab Version (VIA-A) and acculturative stress with the SAFE

Acculturation Stress Scale- Revised. Relevant findings related to acculturation were somewhat consistent with the previous study's findings using the MAAS (Berry, 2005). In this study, both separation and integration were associated with high Arab identity. Integration was also associated with better overall adjustment and mental health. Higher levels of acculturation predicted lower levels of acculturative stress and higher levels of social support. Thus, separated and marginalized statuses were associated with greater acculturative stress, anxiety, and depression than the integrated or assimilated statuses. Significant differences in stress were not found between men and women (Amer).

The prior dissertation research (Amer, 2005) was expanded upon by focusing on 100 of the 611 Arab participants (Willems, 2012). The 100 that were selected were those that were living in different cities across the U.S., but not born in the U.S. Further, they were selected to explore whether perceived religious discrimination correlated with their acculturation status. Correlations were complicated, but there were some correlations found between the modified acculturation scales for Arabs (VAI-A) and some subscales of discrimination. Significant differences were not found with length of time living abroad in the Arab world or gender. For these immigrants from the Arab world, family, safety, freedom, and opportunity were important factors. Continuous adaptation in the face of discrimination was seen.

Differences in the experience of acculturative stress may not change among Arab and Muslim woman based on their style of dress alone. The way an Arab Muslim woman is treated by the people of the country she moves to affects her transition and adjustment experience. In an interesting study in Quebec, Canada, a female experimenter passed out surveys dressed either in Western clothing with a French name (Anne-Marie Vaillancourt), Western clothing with an Arab Muslim name (Khadijah Mohamed Alhamadani), hijab with the Arab Muslim name, or niqab

with the Arab Muslim name (El-Geledi & Bourhis, 2012). Strangely, more favorable attitudes were seen towards the female wearing niqab than the female dressed in Western clothing with a Western name. However, when presented with pictures only of women wearing different styles of dress, more negative attitudes and prejudices were endorsed toward the veiled women. In this study, the explanation was given that the participants were being more favorable in person to a niqabi female as an effort to counter any perceived stereotypes. More plausible, is that the experience of being in the presence of an individual, hearing their voice, and interacting with them has a greater effect on people. Recognizing Muslim women as human and as individuals can reduce feelings of the otherness and negativity that is often associated with media and public image.

Thus, there is not a clear study or link that others treat a known Arab Muslim woman more negatively based on her dress in Western style clothing, in hijab, or in niqab (El-Geledi & Bourhis, 2012). There are, however, many reports of acts of discrimination based on the individual being perceived as Arab or Muslim. Surely, the hijab and niqab are identifiable as Arab or Muslim. As discussed though in the section on Discrimination Towards Arabs and Muslims, there is not always a direct link associating Arab and Muslim experiences of discrimination with their outward appearance. Indian and South Asians who were not Muslim were targeted after 9/11 based on the appearance of their complexions. Establishments and places of worship were targeted based on their attendance by Arabs and Muslims. Individuals were targeted based only on their names sounding Arab or Muslim. In other words, there is no clear information that a woman wearing niqab or hijab will have a more or less difficult experience transitioning and adjusting to life and study in the U.S. than a woman who simply has an identifiable Arab or Muslim name and/or otherwise modest style of dress.

First generation Muslim migrants were found to experience less distress when they had acquired skills for living in a different society (Fassaert, Matty, Tuinebreijer, Knipscheer, Verhoeff, Beekman, et al., 2011). These migrants were Turkish and Moroccan men and women living in the Netherlands. For the Moroccans only, less distress was also related with traditionalism. There was a lack of clarity using existing measures of acculturation as to what exactly was related to more or less distress for migrants. Overall, participating in mainstream society, learning the language, and also keeping cultural traditions seems to be the best combination. Once again, the actual voices of these men and women may be lost among the measures. What their stories are and what they perceive as being associated with more or less distress is not found here.

Length of time in the United States, reasons for immigration, the ability to visit country of origin, long term plans to stay in the United States, and family still living abroad (Erikson & Al-Timimi, 2001, p.312) have been recommended by those with experience providing mental health services to Arab Americans to be explored. These factors may also be important to consider in attitudes formed toward acculturation and in the ease or difficulty of the transition itself (Hammoudah, 2006). There is some documentation of difficulties with acculturation seen with Arab Muslim clients in counseling and therapy (Nasser-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003; Sayed, 2003). Arab therapists with direct experiences working with Arab American Muslims in the U.S. were interviewed (Nasser-McMillan and Hakim-Larson). Presenting issues of conflicts and hostility within the family were related to family members being at different levels of acculturation. Differing levels of acculturation among Arab Americans may inhibit the individuals from developing positive ethnic and cohesive group identities (Erickson and Al-Timimi, 2000; p. 313).

Sayed (2003) described the identity conflicts and the "cultural split" he observed in psychotherapy with Arab Muslim clients living in the West (p. 451). Sayed wrote, "Certain members of the Arab world staying or studying abroad, or otherwise buried outside their own cultural experiences, may in fact themselves experience a kind of cultural split, wherein they feel that they do not truly belong to either culture, and yet participate in both" (p.451). As discussed in the sections on Media and Public Image and Discrimination Towards Arabs and Muslims, histories of war and political strife, American foreign policy, and ethnic and religious discrimination all impact experiences living in and choices in acculturating to the U.S. (Cainker, 2002, Zogby, 2002; Erickson and Al-Timimi, 2000).

An interesting and often overlooked point is that a major stressor for the Arab woman is their public image, and the image of their family (Meleis & Hattar-Pollera, 1995; Hattar-Pollara & Meleis, 1995a). In fact, the greatest stressors for Arab women are posed to be familialism and rumors (Meleis & Hattar-Pollera). Familialism is the commitment to the family. Rumors are the experience when other members of the community are talking about the woman. While family may be a great source of support for the female immigrant, it can also be a great source of stress in managing multiple roles, such as that of a wife, mother, student, and/or professional. Jordanian immigrant women were found to experience a great deal of stress in managing their roles as mothers of adolescents, wives, and community members (Hattar-Pollara & Meleis). "Woman are expected to promote and/or maintain the value systems they brought with them" in these three areas:

1. *Adab,* that is, politeness and good behavior
2. *Eaib,* avoiding unacceptable behaviors

3. *Haram,* which differentiates between forbidden actions and sanctioned actions (Meleis & Hattar-Pollera, 1995, p. 145).

To be talked about by community members or extended family is an embarrassment. Therefore, managing family roles and rumors are two sources of great stress for Arab women immigrants that are not necessarily bound by country or culture.

The Cultural Adjustment Difficulties Checklist (CADC) was given in a study with over 250 international students from Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). The CADC has a subscale, which measures acculturative distress, or "cultural stress related to interpersonal conflicts with White Americans, one's own cultural group, and family members; gender confusion; feeling alienated from both cultures; and feeling caught between two cultures" (Reynolds & Constantine, p. 342). This scale seems to also measure those factors included in the earlier acculturation literature, such as marginalization (feelings of not belonging or participating in either culture; Berry, 1997). International students who had higher acculturative distress were more likely to have lower expectations about their career outcome. That is, higher levels of acculturative distress predicted lower levels of career outcome expectations. No significant differences were found by gender or country; which suggests the experience of acculturative distress was not distinct for men or women, or for international students based on their origins. This supports the need to address the impact acculturative stress has on international students in their identity development, which includes their career development.

A unique study with 30 Jordanian immigrant women in the Los Angeles area was published in the nursing literature (Hattar-Pollara & Meleis, 1995b). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant women ages 35 to 59, a majority

of whom were married (95%) and homemakers (92%). The purpose of the study was to describe the lived experiences of Jordanian immigrant women in the U.S. and to understand the stressors related to the immigration experience. A 34 item sociodemographic interview guide was developed by the authors and included questions such as,

- What were your main reasons for coming to the United States?
- What were the main reasons that helped you decide to stay in the United States?
- How often do you visit your country of origin, and for what reasons?
- What would be some of the reasons that will make you decide to remain in the United States or return to your country of origin?
- What were the difficulties you faced during your move to the United States? How did you deal with them?
- What were the least and most troublesome problems for you during the first year of living in the United States?
- What has been the most stressful for you in general?
- On a scale from 1 to 10, how stressed were you during the first few years in the United States.
- How about now? What is most stressful to you now?
- What are the three things you like most about living in the United States?
- What are the three things you like least about living in the United States? (Hattar-Pollara & Meleis, 1995b, p. 526)

Arabic and/or English were used during the interviews based on the participant's preference. Translations were made to English, though specifics on the details of transcriptions and translators used were not provided. The consideration taken of meaning, context, and vocabulary

was noted. Efforts were made in this manner of consideration to remain true to the symbolic meanings reflected by phrases that could not be literally translated.

Content and narrative analyses were used to identify and examine patterns and themes (Hattar-Pollara & Meleis, 1995b). Results revealed five major areas of stress for these women in "managing resettlement, protecting ethnic identity, sociocultural and value conflicts, hopes and aspirations, and choices of strategies for coping" (Hattar-Pollara & Meleis, p. 527). The first few years were perceived as the most stressful for Jordanian women, especially in the role transitions, loss of social support network, and parenting. The need and desire to maintain the ethnic culture was also very strong and expected by family still living back home. The study took an in depth approach to the lived experiences of Christian Jordanian immigrant women.

The Research Gap

As described, studies were found using existing measures or adapting measures for use with Muslim women (Amer, 2005; Haque-Khan, 2014; Willems, 2012). Few studies seek to develop themes based upon the population's actual lived experiences (Meleis & Hattar-Pollera, 1995; Hattar-Pollara & Meleis, 1995a). Further fewer develop the measures themselves based upon research with the population itself (Hattar-Pollara & Meleis, 1995b; Howe, 2013).

There is a striking gap in the scientific literature of studies with Arabic speaking Muslim women immigrants living and studying in the U.S. Further more striking is the paucity of literature that focuses on the recent experiences of such women adapting to and adjusting to life in the U.S. Though literature and books are prevalent on Arab and Muslim women's stories and experiences in the U.S., scientific studies are limited. There were no studies found to date that explore in depth what the Arabic speaking Muslim female college student may be experiencing as a result of her recent transition from her country of origin in the Arab world to the U.S. Much

has been written and debated about Arab and Muslim women in the media, though rarely have the voices of these women been represented in the scientific literature.

Counseling psychologists have a need and a responsibility to give voice to the female Arab Muslim immigrant experience in North America. A recommendation was made in the 1980's to understand and help improve the experiences of Arab students who have immigrated to the U.S (Meleis, 1982). This recommendation still appears to be very applicable today, and many problems faced by the Arab student in the 1980's still appear to be very present today. The challenge is, "how to adjust not only to an educational system that is unfamiliar to them, but also to a lifestyle that may be quite different from that to which they are accustomed" (Meleis, p. 440).

The intent of this study is to work towards understanding what occurs at the individual experience level when a woman from a particular ethnic, linguistic, and religious group leaves a culture and country in which she is familiar with to live in a new and very different culture, country, and educational system. This will not only give voice and recognition to these women's daily-lived experiences, but also further our knowledge and understanding of their experiences. The goal will be to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of these women and what may assist in the transition and adjustment process. This has implications on a university campus community for recruitment, retention, and successful completion of degree programs. The voices and experiences of these women have relevance to research, teaching, practice, policy, social justice, and international relations.

Counseling psychologists are at the forefront in advances in multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skills; however, in this area there is improvement yet to be made. Prior measures of acculturation and identity have only been adapted for use with this population. Measures have

not been developed based on their lived experiences and voices. The implications for counseling psychologists in measurement development are to improve existing measures and/or prompt new measures. With new and better measures, research, teaching, and practice in multiculturalism will improve.

The importance of multiculturalism to the many fields of psychology is known; however, the importance of multiculturalism to international relations is somewhat less highlighted. The importance here is a fundamental belief that reducing notions of what is different, strange, and unknown, will inevitably reduce fear. Specifically, that education on the lived experiences of women from the Arab world will reduce the sense of otherness and hopefully increase the motivation for connection and peace at a human level.

Purpose of this Study

This dissertation study primarily described the experiences that a small and unique group of women have undergone in the transition from their life in their previous country of residence in the Arab world to their new life in a university community in the U.S. Experiences related to the transition were explored in depth. The story of how and why they came to the U.S. was shared, but more importantly, how they dealt with the changes in culture and life in their recent years since the transition. This included, but was not limited to, how they coped with living in a society with a different primary language, religion, work style, educational system, and way of life.

How have these women experienced and dealt with all these changes, in addition to the possible loss of immediate or extended family and their support system? What has aided or been helpful to these women during this process? How have these women dealt or coped with the negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims by the media and general public? How have political

and historical events, the image the Arab world has of America, and the image America has portrayed of the Arab world played a role in their transition experiences and/or attitudes toward the people or life here?

This study was interested in how female Arabic speaking Muslim students have adjusted to the educational system in the U.S. This research explored what they felt about the way Americans are living. This study sought to understand how this lifestyle was different from what they were accustomed to. The stories of these women communicated how others have treated them. Their stories also expressed how they were functioning and adapting in response.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how Muslim women experience transition and adjustment from the Arab world to the life and study in the American world.

Research Questions

1. How do Arabic speaking Muslim women describe their experience of what it has been like to leave their home country and move to study in the U.S.? How have they experienced the transition and what meanings do they make of their experience?
2. What are the differences and similarities in life in the Arab world and life in the U.S.? What has been different about living in the U.S., and what has stayed the same?
3. How have Muslim women dealt with and coped with the changes in the new culture and country? What has aided or eased their recent transition and subsequent adjustment to living in a university campus community in the United States? What has caused barriers or obstacles to successful adjustment?
4. What advice would Muslim women give to other Muslim women living in the Arab world thinking of or planning to move to study in the U.S.? What information would they give to these women once they arrive?

5. What advice would Muslim women give to their university, faculty, or peers about their experience studying in the U.S.? What was helpful to aide or ease the transition and adjustment, and where is there room for improvement?

CHAPTER II

METHODS

The aim of this dissertation was to explore and identify themes in the experiences of Muslim women who were transitioning to and adjusting to a life and education in America. The transition is a process in which movement, or change, is occurring. The adjustment is the adaptation to the change. The change is the new environment. The goal here was to richly capture their initial and ongoing experiences following travel to this new environment. Their travel was from a predominantly Muslim and Arabic speaking country to a country in which they were no longer a native.

The focus of this study was on the daily-lived experiences of these women in a higher education setting. This group of women was not defined by their destination or future travel plans, but by their origins. They were women who were from countries of origin in the Arab world and had physically relocated, for one reason or another, to live and study abroad. They had left their native countries to travel and live elsewhere. They may be planning to return home following their stay, or they may be in hopes to set up permanent residence. Once again, this group of women was not defined by their ultimate destination, but by their experience of having left the place they call home to build another home, be it temporary or permanent.

The scope of this study was to explore and identify understandings made over the period of time from travel through arrival, transition, and adjustment. The purpose was to give voice to these women's transition and adjustment experiences. This chapter will discuss the research approach and methods used to gain an in depth understanding of what these Muslim women experienced when they moved from the Arab world to live and study in the American world.

Research Paradigm

The concept of a world is a domain in which life and certain realities exist. The research paradigm can be explained as a world. It is a world, or an environment, in which the research is constructed within. Every researcher exists and operates from a conceptual framework that is the meaning they have made of their world, and their research. To make meaning of another's world is to have a sense of awareness of one's own.

The qualitative paradigms that most closely shaped the focus of this study were the constructivist and critical-ideologist paradigms (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). As a constructivist, meaning is made through interactions and relationships of mind, body, and spirit. Thoughts, feelings, words, ideas, and memories are transmitted or exchanged through verbal and nonverbal communications. These communications are compiled, deeply analyzed, reorganized, and constructed into a meaningful whole that tells a story authored by the primary researcher.

The constructivist paradigm alone does not highlight the massive emphasis and importance of a multicultural world (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). As a critical-ideologist, strong feelings on global and social issues of advocacy, empowerment, equity, and integrity come through. An irreplaceable lens that shapes the view of this paradigm, or world, is one of social justice. It is an eye through which the story is being seen. It gives voice to multiple facets and interactions of religion, gender, culture, and psychology. It demands an awareness of these relationships.

The paradigms in which this work was written within have been described. Truthful descriptions were shared of how the researcher sees the world. The researcher's self-experiences were explored and bracketed in The Researcher section of this chapter in order to identify assumptions and biases. By these efforts, an honest attempt was made to fairly describe and

understand the experiences of a group of women whose stories are rarely told. That is the meaning of this work.

Research Methodology

To study what Muslim women from the Arab world experience in transitioning to and adjusting to living in the United States, a phenomenological approach was used. The basic features of a phenomenological study are a) identifying that there is an essential phenomenon to be studied, b) that the way of study is through understanding individual experiences, c) sharing researcher biases and assumptions to best understand the phenomenon, d) the use of phenomenological data analysis, and e) tying back the results with the philosophy of study (Creswell, 1998). I discuss how this method best fit the purpose of this study.

The phenomena of interest in this study were the lived experiences of Arabic speaking Muslim women who had recently moved to the U.S. I was interested in knowing what they have experienced as a result of transitioning to the U.S. I explored how they were adjusting to living in the U.S. There were many questions to explore. The plan was to understand how they adjust and adapt to living in such a different country and culture.

In what ways were these women adapting to life in the U.S.? What was their life like before they moved? What was it like during the first few weeks of being here? How has their life changed over the time that they have lived in the U.S.? What changes might they have experienced in education, family life, and social life? How were they coping and dealing with these changes? What hardships have they faced and what comforts have they had? How have they been impacted and affected by their experiences in the United States?

This study sought to learn and explain what was involved for Muslim women in this process of transitioning and adjusting. The women in this study were from a distinct culture and

had been immersed into contact with a majority of other individuals from a very different culture. The goal of this research was to capture what their experiences have been. Using the phenomenological approach, I wanted to, "enter the field of perception of participants, seeing how they experience, live, and display the phenomenon," and find meaning in their experiences (Creswell, 1998, p.31).

The phenomenological approach allowed me to immerse myself in the research process (Creswell, 1998). This provided a deeper understanding of the participants' stories in order to identify themes that emerged. Themes explained the meaning that has been made from the participants' shared stories and experiences. By this phenomenological approach, sincere descriptions were made of what happens when people from a particular ethnic and religious group adjust to life in the U.S.

Participants

Criterion Selection

Participants in this study were nine bilingual, Muslim female students, eighteen years of age or older, with origins in the Arab world. Women who were enrolled as college or university students had been recruited to participate in this study. Women were recruited who self-identified as Muslims, as Arabic speakers, and as U.S. immigrants. They were to self-identify as having origins from a country in the Arab world. They were to have migrated from their respective countries of origin in the Arab world. In Asia, these countries are Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, The United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. In Africa, these countries are Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia. Women who met criteria for this study self-

identified as having the ability to speak, read, and write in English and Arabic. Therefore, these women were bilingual and proficient as both an Arabic and English speaker.

The selection criterion was that women had moved from predominantly Arabic speaking and Muslim countries and had been enrolled as students in a college or university in the U.S. Due to the nuances of immigration laws and visa statuses, these women may or may not have held the official university status of an international student. Women who have moved to live and study in the U.S. for the first time may be international students; however, they may also be U.S. citizens by birth or marriage and be living in the U.S. for the first time as an adult. They may also hold refugee status, which allows for indefinite stay. Permanent residents and green card holders obtained through family, marriage, or work may be from the Arab world and not registered as international students. Student status (undergraduate, graduate, in state, out of state, or international) was asked in the demographic questionnaire; however, this was not a selection criterion.

Women who had an opportunity to experience life in the U.S. for some period of time were recruited. They had lived in the U.S. for at least one year. Allowing for an approximate one year period of time to live within the American culture and campus community was important. This provided for richer stories, more experiences to share, and more in depth responses. In order for women to be verbal, fluent, and able to articulate their stories they also needed to be capable to provide their own consent to participate in research. In other words, these adult women did not have intellectual deficiencies that would cause them to be unable to speak, read, or write without assistance. Therefore, they did not require the consent of any legal guardian to participate in research.

Women were chosen to participate in this study for several reasons. In past research on transition and adjustment from the Arab world to the United States, women's voices were rarely heard or shared. The nature of qualitative research is such that a group of individuals is selected with the closest range of experiences in order to best summarize and describe the phenomenon of interest. In order to best describe the experiences of transition and adjustment, gender selection was required to be made. Muslim men who are transitioning and adjusting to life in the U.S. may have considerably different experiences than females.

A separate study exploring the Muslim male experience would be necessary, and a female investigator would not be appropriate for this study due to the cultural and religious separation of adult males and females in Islam. As a female investigator, there are religious sanctions as well as safety concerns with meeting privately with adult male Muslims. It is also essential that the same investigator who collects the interview data is identifying the themes and writing the analysis. This is essential due to the observational data that may be collected either by in person interviews or by tone, pitch, and inflection of voice over the phone. It is also essential in selecting the best probing questions and in guiding the direction of the semi-structured interview. For these reasons, female participants only were recruited for the study.

Following recruitment, a total of nine women participated in the study. The women in this study attended institutions of higher education in the U.S. for their bachelor's, masters, or doctoral degrees. They self-identified as Arab, Caucasian, Egyptian, Kurdish Iraqi, Middle Eastern, Moroccan, Palestinian, Saudi, and Sudanese. They were between the ages of 20 to 35 and were married, divorced, or single. Three of the women also had children.

The women in this study reported the faith practices they had maintained back home and in the U.S. Every woman in this study reported that she was practicing *salah* (daily prayers),

sawm (fasting), *zakah* (charity), and reading Qur'an both back home and in the U.S. Six women reported that they were currently wearing or had worn hijab in the past. One women reported that she had worn niqab in the past. For a more detailed description of their background and religious practices, refer to the participant demographics section in the results chapter.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited at geographic areas and universities within the U.S. Following recruitment, a total of nine women living in Michigan participated in the study. Recruitment was done nationally. Mosques, student organizations, social or academic clubs, and international student offices were contacted via email, phone, or in person (Appendix A). A request was made to notify the researcher of their willingness to share a flyer about the study with potential participants through email, print, website posting, bulletin board posting, or a social media outlet including Facebook or Twitter. The flyer indicated the requirements to participate in the study including: adult, female, Muslim, English and Arabic speaker, college or university student, living in the U.S. for one year, from a country of origin in the Arab world, capable of providing their own consent to participate in a research study.

Participants were also recruited through word of mouth and snowballing techniques. These networks were those referred to the researcher through word of mouth, colleagues, peers, or coworkers. Individuals who expressed interest received a flyer by hard copy in person or mail, email, messaging service (such as text messaging), or a social media outlet (such as sharing on Facebook). Flyers were also shared or posted on public social networks. The researcher posted flyers on Facebook pages that allowed posting open to the public, such as Arabic language clubs. Requests were sent (Appendix A) to any social media site of an organization, club, or office that did not have an open posting policy.

Participants responded to the researcher directly with interest to volunteer for this study. They were screened for participation by the researcher and informed of what the research process would entail (Appendix B). Contact methods available to reach the researcher for screening to participate were flexible, including email, text messaging, or phone. Those women who had been screened and wished to participate had the informed consent process explained to them and had their interviews scheduled. Those women who had contacted the researcher after data collection was completed, did not meet criteria for the study, or did not wish to participate in the study were thanked for their time and wished well in their academic endeavors.

Participants were afforded the option of a phone interview or an in person interview when possible. Five interviews were completed in person and four interviews were completed by phone. Locations that afforded privacy and safety for the interview were discussed. The interview location was agreed upon ahead of time. Both in person and phone interviews provided detailed, in depth responses. The researcher did not feel there was any difference in terms of the depth of the responses given either by phone or in person. Participants were articulate and most participants gave lengthy and rich responses when prompted with one or two questions. Interview data and transcripts of interviews and follow up phone calls were extensive.

Participants were offered compensation for their time in the form of a $25 prepaid visa gift card. This was meant to assist in childcare or other costs necessary for their time spent participating in the study. The $25 prepaid visa gift card was provided in an envelope with a thank you card (Appendix E). Participants received this from the researcher at the end of the 60-90 minute in person interview, or by mail sent immediately following phone interviews. There was no compensation for the follow-up phone call.

This was a purposive sample. The first eight to ten females that met the criteria, agreed to participate, and were able to schedule times to interview were invited to participate in this study. Those that did not meet criteria or who contacted the researcher after data collection was completed were thanked. Organizations or offices that agreed to post or share recruitment flyers via hard copy or the web were notified once data collection was complete to discontinue or remove any postings.

Setting

Participants were offered the choice of in person interviews when possible or phone interviews. In person interviews took place at a convenient location for the participant that also met the requirements for the research project. The setting was required to afford privacy and only the researcher and the participant were permitted to be present during the interview. Participants were provided with several options for the location of conducting private in person interviews. Examples were a reserved private room or a conference room in a public place of worship, an office, a library, a community center, or a college or university.

Participants were asked to choose which options for interviewing were most convenient for them (in person or phone) in order to provide a confidential and comfortable environment. In person interviews were offered at settings where privacy and safety could be ensured. In any location, the participant and the researcher were the only two individuals present in the room during the interview to ensure comfort, lack of disturbance or disruption, and confidentiality. For phone interviews, the researcher requested that the participant be the only one present in the private location of their choice. Again, this request was to ensure confidentiality and lack of disruption.

Interview Process

The method of data collection that I chose was interviewing. The individual method of interviewing was chosen to provide a comfortable atmosphere and engage women in the process. This may have been the first time that participants were actively engaged in a discussion about their experiences living in the United States. Using semi-structured interviewing, I obtained rich information within a reasonably limited amount of time, i.e. 1 to 2 interviews.

Women were asked in the invitation to participate to contact the researcher by email or by phone to express interest in participating. Once a potential participant contacted the researcher to express interest in the study, they were provided further details about the research process (Appendix B). At that time, the criteria for participating was reviewed to be sure they met it. Once the participant was screened, met criteria, and desired to volunteer, an interview was scheduled.

The process of giving written consent prior to participation was explained. Informed consent forms were provided prior to in person interviews. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions in person regarding the consent form prior to signing. Based on the preference of the participant, consent forms for phone interviews were emailed, faxed, or mailed with pre-paid, pre-addressed return envelopes. Women who were planning to interview by phone had the opportunity to contact the researcher by phone or email to ask questions regarding the consent forms prior to signing.

I discussed and answered any questions the participant had by phone, email, or in person about the material in the consent forms. Consent forms were received with a signature prior to conducting any phone or in person interviews. Women were asked to read the consent forms and to ask the researcher any questions before signing and agreeing to participate. For phone

interviews, the consent form was obtained with a signature prior to the tentatively scheduled phone interview day. For in person interviews, signatures were obtained on consent forms on the interview day prior to proceeding with any data collection.

Interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in English. A limitation was recognized that Arabic was the participants' native language; however, the criterion of having bilingual Arabic and English speaking participants addressed this limitation. Further, I immediately translated to English any spontaneous Arabic used by participants during the interview. I then checked the accuracy of my English translation during the interview by repeating it back to the participant and asking for feedback.

For phone interviews, I began the interview day with the demographic questionnaire (Appendix C), which included a brief informal introduction and a reminder of the purpose of the study. Demographic questionnaires were read to all participants prior to the interview to collect background information. The researcher recorded the participants' verbal responses to the demographic questionnaires.

As part of the discussion of the purpose of the study, I explained that it was the aim of the interview to share individual experiences, thoughts, and ideas about what it has been like as a Muslim woman from an Arab country moving to and living in the United States (Appendix C). I told participants that my purpose was to learn what their experiences have been in transitioning to and adjusting to this country and culture. I let them know of the timeline of the interview process (60-90 minute interview and a 20-30 minute follow-up phone call sometime later to review a summary of their story for accuracy). Women who participated in the study were reminded that the interview and follow-up phone calls would both be audio recorded. We then began the demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire provided detailed

background information, such as date and place of birth, the countries participants and their family members had lived in and visited, and the length of stay at each location.

During the interview (Appendix D), I posed open-ended questions in a story like sequence. Women were asked to share their experiences from the time they left their country of origin to the present time. As this was a semi-structured interview, probing questions were listed to allow for flexibility to further explore participant responses. The focus of the researcher during the interview was on listening to the participant and selecting the best probes for them to elaborate in greater depth. Notes taken by the researcher during the interviews served to keep track of important thoughts, ideas, or questions to ask.

During the follow-up phone call (Appendix G), a summary of the participants' stories was reviewed. Prior to the follow-up phone call, participants received a summary of their stories for review (Appendix F). The phone call began with reviewing the major points extracted from their personal stories. Participants were then asked if they wished to elaborate or clarify anything further on each point. Participants were also asked if there was anything else they felt was important for me to know about their story or anything further they wished to share or discuss. They were asked if there was anything I had not asked them about throughout the course of the interviews that would be important for me to know about their experiences.

During the follow-up phone call, participants were notified that a summary of results of this study would be shared with them once the study was completed (Appendix H). They were reminded of informed consent and confidentiality and asked if they had any questions about the use of this research or results of this study. They were asked about how their experience was in the interview process and to share any feedback they may have for me to improve on the process in the future. They were asked if they would like to share any feedback with me about the

process of the interviews or ways to improve it for future studies. The researcher made two email and two phone call attempts to schedule the follow-up. The researcher proceeded with data analysis as is when the researcher was unable to obtain additional feedback from participants.

Data Analysis

I used Marshall and Rossman's (2006b) typical analytic procedure of organizing the data, immersing yourself in the data, and generating categories and themes to guide the data analysis. This provided a structure of what the beginning processes of data analysis entailed. The first step of organizing the data included gathering audio recordings, notes taken during interviews, and transcriptions. Organizing the data also included the transcription of the audio. Word for word transcriptions of the interviews and follow-up phone calls were completed in typed English.

The second step of immersion into the data (Marshall and Rossman, 2006b) began when listening to the audio recordings of the interviews and also reviewing the notes taken during the interviews. Notes were taken on thoughts, ideas, or questions I had at that time. Further immersion into the data occurred with reading all the transcriptions from the individual interviews. Reading the transcriptions together at one time allowed for deeper immersion in the data. In doing so, ideas of what were important and what the participants were sharing became evident. Their stories began to be understood in context.

The third step of the analytical procedure was generating categories and themes (Marshall and Rossman, 2006b). Editing analysis, or inductive analysis occurred when the data began to move from specific quotes, lines, and stories to overall ideas, categories, and themes (Hatch, 2002). In the inductive analysis approach to information processing, movement is from the specific to the general. Categories, or groupings of concepts, ideas, thoughts, or salient points, emerged from the data. Categories were generated from listening to and reading the participant

stories. Spreadsheets were created to organize the categories that were noticeable. These categories were reviewed in depth for themes that emerged.

These personal stories, which were specific only to the individual, were then reformed to a summary of themes that best described the more general experience of this unique group of women. Using the words that Muslim women shared to explain the world around them, then transforming these words into a set of themes was the basis for phenomenological research. The way of study of this phenomenon of interest (the experience of transition and adjustment to life and study in the U.S.) was through understanding individual experiences (Cresswell, 1998).

Rigor of the Study

This qualitative study relied heavily on the detailed analysis conducted and full description of the analyses (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995). The reader was provided with a clear portrait of the many complexities and variants of the participants' experiences. I used the strategies of reflexivity, low inference descriptors, and participant feedback (Johnson, 1997). I also used an auditor to review the anonymous transcripts.

Reflexivity involved critical examination of the self and reflecting upon this process as it pertained to the research. To do this, I documented my experiences and worked to identify my biases during the research process. I briefly journaled for 10 to 15 minutes immediately following the interviews to document thoughts and first impressions. I was cognizant of my feelings towards the transition process and my own experiences as a Muslim woman. I was considerate when participant experiences were similar or different from my own. I recognized my own reactions to themes that emerged that I expected or did not expect based on my own biases and/or the previous research. I attempted to uncover, through increased self-awareness, how my biases may have affected the results and conclusions.

Low inference descriptors were used to increase accuracy in describing the data (Johnson, 1997). Using low inference descriptors meant that the descriptions of participant's stories were phrased as closely to their actual accounts as possible. The lowest inference descriptor was a direct quote, in which the actual wording of the participant response was given. To use low inference descriptors, the data was recorded verbatim from the audio taped interviews and follow-up phone calls. When analyzing the data and describing the results, participants' verbal responses were accurately represented and directly quoted as often as possible. The generation of codes, categories, and themes was aided by low inference descriptors in that this assisted in remaining as true as possible to the actual participant stories.

Gaining participant feedback assisted in verifying that there had not been any miscommunications and that the interpretations were accurate (Johnson, 1997). Participant feedback, or member checks, were elicited by discussing the findings with participants during the follow up phone call. I summarized their stories and they were asked if they agreed with the initial findings or had any suggestions to offer. Participants had been provided the written summary of their stories prior to the follow up phone call. This allowed them an opportunity to review their summary in writing and give thoughtful feedback.

During the member checks on follow up phone calls, participants provided additional data to include in the analysis. For example, one participant shared that she had thought about and reviewed her summary on her experiences with discrimination. She felt she wished to share an additional experience that she had. More than one participant asked the researcher to correct their grammar in quotes prior to publishing. One participant specifically had corrected her own grammar and read the edits aloud that she wished the researcher to make during the follow up phone call. Participants further shared detailed feedback on their experience being in this study,

which is described in the results chapter under the section titled research process. They enjoyed participating, encouraged publication and future studies, and complimented the researcher on the design and steps taken to ensure confidentiality.

An auditor reviewed for accuracy the codes, categories, and themes generated by the researcher. The auditor had familiarity with the population of interest in this study. The auditor reviewed anonymous transcripts of the interviews and follow up phone calls. The auditor served to double-check the categories and themes that emerged from the data. The auditor provided feedback on the researcher's analysis of the data after reviewing the anonymous transcriptions. The auditor informed the researcher on any emergent categories or themes that may have been overlooked.

The auditor was most beneficial in this review of emergent categories and themes. As the auditor was not involved in interviews or the interview process, they were able to provide an outside perspective on the organization. For example, the auditor assisted the researcher while the researcher was discussing and developing themes that emerged from categories. The auditor provided the researcher with a sounding board to reflect back the analysis that the researcher was developing. The auditor also provided feedback on whether each theme content reflected each theme title. For example, two themes that developed under the succeeding process (inner strength/independence and respect/understanding) were initially under one theme title. After elaborating verbally with the auditor what the researcher wanted to express in the write-up of the analysis, the emergent theme was split into two themes and later placed under an overall or overarching process titled the succeeding process.

The Researcher

I am pleased with Allah as my God, and Islam as my religion, and Muhammad (may the blessings and the peace of Allah be upon him, his family, and his companions) as my messenger. I am Muslim. I wear hijab. I desire to be a better Muslim and to increase in my knowledge, practice, and faith.

I was born in New York and was taught Qur'an and Arabic at an early age. I was raised mostly in the Chicago suburbs. My family moved and travelled often, and we spent summers with extended family in Cairo, Egypt. I also spent two years of high school in Egypt, my freshman year and my senior year. My junior and sophomore years were spent in the U.S. After graduating from high school in Egypt, I came back to the U.S. for college. I completed a Bachelors of Arts in psychology at Northern Illinois University, and a Masters of Arts in clinical psychology at Ball State University. This research has been completed as part of the requirements for the counseling psychology doctoral program at Western Michigan University.

I have worked with several local and national Muslim, inter-faith, and multicultural organizations. I have organized interfaith panels and diversity trainings for government and public institutions. I lead a youth group that is regularly involved in volunteer activities that promote intercultural exchanges and community education. I feel passionate about doing outreach, and I feel passionate about providing counseling services. The focus of my clinical work has been with underserved populations, ethnic minorities, international students, immigrants, refugees, children and families, Muslims, and Arabic-speakers. I have worked in home-based treatment, residential treatment, university counseling centers, alternative high school, private practice, children's protective services, community college, and refugee programs. My areas of interest are social advocacy, career development, grief and trauma, abuse

and neglect, and religiosity and spirituality. I care about advocating for others and assisting them in learning about themselves, the world around them, and the resources available to them.

I have never had the experience that the women in this study have, of coming to live in the U.S. and study in the U.S. for the first time. My experiences have been multiple transitions back and forth between the U.S. and Egypt. My parents were born in 1938 and 1944, and moved to Czechoslovakia, Canada, and then the U.S. for higher education in the early seventies. I was their third child, and the first U.S. born. My extended family network consists of about 200 relatives, who are mostly in Egypt. It was a common and normal experience for my immediate family members to be split up with some living in the U.S. and some living in Egypt at different points in time.

Once again, I have not had the experience as an adult of moving to live in America for the first time or of moving to live in Egypt for the first time. As I have always been between worlds (the American and the Arab), I cannot share truly in this experience with my participants. I was exposed to the two different countries as a child and through adulthood. For myself, both countries felt like home in different ways. The U.S. with familiarity of the educational system and work environment, and Egypt with feelings of cultural and religious inclusivity and a strong extended family network.

From as far as I can remember as a child until the age of 14 or 15, my parents took me to an all-day Saturday school in Illinois for Islamic education. During these Saturday afternoons and evenings, we would learn to read, write, memorize, and recite Qur'an. We were encouraged to understand the meaning of our religion and its message. We would pray together, listen to lectures and speeches, have recitals, eat dinners, and gather as families to visit at one another's

homes and converse until late hours. Within these settings, the feelings of otherness of being Muslim in America were minimized.

As a child, I experienced a joy in being with so many other children and family members in Egypt. The hardships of the transitions back and forth between Egypt and the U.S. seemed minimal during childhood. Family members were within walking distance of one another in Cairo, and daily gatherings with extended family for meals and for socializing were common. As I grew older, recognition of poverty and privileges developed. This was always at the forefront of my experiences transitioning and adjusting back and forth from Cairo as an adult. My family in Egypt is highly educated; however, education does not reflect income in this country. This characterizes most of Egypt, college graduates and skilled professionals that remain low-income or even in poverty due to the economy. As a child, for summers and for my first year of high school, our family lived in one of the most impoverished urban areas of Cairo; however, I did not notice or pay attention to this as a child. Water shortages were common and the Nile water was not to be touched for fear of disease.

As an early teen, the economic conveniences of life in the U.S. became more apparent and desirable, such as air conditioning, running hot water, and plumbing. In my later year of high school spent in Egypt, our housing situation changed and we lived in a newly developed area (newly developed at that time). The area was cleaner and less populated, though has now grown to be a highly populated and urban area. These changes to cleaner streets, less water shortages, running hot water, air conditioning, and more malls and superstores made the transition back and forth from Egypt to the U.S. easier as an adolescent.

As a late adolescent and early adult, the realization of the benefits of having an extended family support system and a religious support system also began to surface. The experience is

comforting when one lives in a country where the majority of people dress, speak, and practice similar to you.

As a young adult beginning college in the U.S., this was a memorable challenge. Learning or attempting to assimilate, while still attempting to maintain religious and cultural practices. An adherence to time and schedules was less emphasized in Egypt, as well as in my immediate family. Completion of work and quality of work was more emphasized. This was always in stark contrast with the U.S. educational system. As was the emphasis on global affairs and obtaining fluencies in multiple languages (in Egypt), compared to the emphasis (in the U.S.) on learning U.S. history, U.S. geography, U.S. literature and scholarly texts, etc.

My most memorable transition and adjustment experience was that of wearing the hijab, which took place after a few years into my doctoral program. Although I did not physically relocate to a different country, I felt as though I was navigating my way in the U.S. for the first time. I found comfort in being around so many others in Egypt who also wore hijab. It took time to accept the difficult lines of questioning by those in the U.S. as an opportunity for teaching rather than a personal attack. I continue to strive and remind myself to accept challenges as opportunities for growth and learning. I also strive to remind myself of all the blessings, including hijab, that I am grateful and thankful for to Allah.

My meaning making and critical ideological paradigms of social justice and advocacy are shaped by my own transition and adjustment experiences. I have been given knowledge and insight to a global climate. These experiences from childhood through adulthood shaped my worldview. I was privileged to have a unique perspective.

From my experience in past research that I have done with a population of Muslims, I learned that qualitative research is ideal to give voice to their experiences (Hammoudah, 2002;

2005; 2006). Of importance to reiterate is that I have past research experience with Muslims and bilingual English and Arabic-speakers, and I am also a Muslim woman who is bilingual in English and Arabic and from a country of origin in the Arab world. I have worked to identify assumptions and biases that I need to be aware of in proceeding with this current dissertation study. This work of identifying my assumptions and biases has helped to show the lens in which I am using to write this research.

I have assumed that there are some common themes or ideas that individuals from this background share in dealing with moving to or living in the United States. I believe some of these are language barriers, changes in family roles, value considerations, changes in peer groups, religious identification, religious questioning, experiences with discrimination, learning to independently manage finances, learning to adjust to timeliness and schedule driven days, changes in socioeconomic status, and changes in perceptions of self, the group, and others.

I aim to present and share truthful research. I aimed to develop interview questions that allowed participants the opportunity to share successes, as well as struggles. I hope their stories may be a guide for counselors, educators, researchers, international student programs, mentor programs, admissions, recruitment, student retention, campus activities boards, etc. I feel this research work is of importance and I would like for the results to promote tolerance. I would like the dissemination of the results to promote tolerance by providing education and awareness on what life is like for the Muslim woman who has moved from the Arab world to the United States. I would like to share a picture of their lives, the story of their transition and adjustment experience.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Structure of Chapter III

In this chapter, the results of this study are presented in a chronological order. The participants' stories are shared in the chronology or timeline of the way they experienced their transition and adjustment to life and study in the U.S. Within the chronology of their story line, the themes are presented. They are highlighted and described. This structure was used in order to present the themes as they emerged from the data. Themes are typically shared experiences, though they are not necessarily presented on a timeline. Themes are sometimes overlapping one another, as well as overlapping across time. The themes in this study were shared as they occurred, within the chronological timeline of the lifetime of these women. This was how the themes emerged from the data. Themes in this qualitative study emerged from the interview data of women as a chronological story.

The story line shared in this study begins from the point in time where these women were back home and had not yet moved to the U.S. to the point in time where they have lived here for some years and had adjusted successfully to life here. The interview questions were developed with this order in mind. Thus, results of the interview data and analysis are presented consistent with the question order. Participants were asked additional questions on their feedback for newcomers and their feedback for academia towards the end of the interview. These questions were not directly part of telling their story, or the timeline in which it occurred. These questions yielded such unexpected and rich responses that the researcher felt summaries of them were important to include. These were specific recommendations they made to newcomers on how to

succeed here (section titled recipe for success) and specific requests from their colleges and universities on how to improve the campus and learning environment for them (section titled accept and accommodate us).

During an initial phase, or the transition process, a picture of life back home prior to moving is presented. Then, reasons and decisions involved in moving are discussed. The physical transition of leaving home and the emotions associated with that were shared. Then, arrival to the U.S. and the initial reactions women had are presented. Within this transition process, any themes that emerged are highlighted and discussed.

During the second phase, or the adjusting process, this is where the participants' experiences changing over time are explored. This is the time from after their initial arrival and when they really start to notice changes in their life surrounding religion, culture, studies, family, and socializing. When they are first leaving home and just initially arriving to the U.S., things are too busy and there are too many physical demands to really process the impact of all the changes on a deeper level. In this adjusting process, this is the time when challenges become apparent and decisions are starting to be made on how to deal with these challenges. Themes in this stage highlight what the women were actively adjusting to. Not only what was being presented around them and what they noticed, but also what meaning they were making of the impact that the change had on them.

The third phase or stage of the story for these women in this study was coined as the succeeding process. This is the process where they are now aware of the changes, they have processed what is going on, they have tried some strategies, and they know what works. They are now able to identify and verbalize how they coped, how they found support, what they did to change themselves, and how they saw others differently after this whole experience. After this

last stage of the process, they are experienced and confident to give solid and clear advice to newcomers, to their universities, and to the researcher.

Prior to presenting the results of this study and telling the intriguing story of these women in depth, participant demographics are given. Demographics were obtained from the demographic questionnaire as well as some self-reports during the interviews. These demographics explain who these women were, where they were coming from, what their travels were like, and what their religious practices were. This gives any reader who is not familiar with the population of interest in this study a most thorough understanding of the multiple layers that may be used to describe women from countries of origin in the Arab world.

Participant Demographics

In order to protect participant confidentiality, demographics are reported in aggregate without specifying the numbers of women who belong to each demographic. All the women who participated in this study were living in Michigan at the time of data collection. Muslim women in higher education living in Michigan may potentially be members of tight knit groups. To protect their confidentiality, pseudonyms or participant numbers were not used in presenting the results in this chapter. This prevents individual quotes or stories from being connected together to give a detailed picture of any one participant that might be identifiable. Thus, as promised to these women, any information that could identify them individually or could be used together to lead anyone from their community to identify them is refrained from.

Also, as a reminder and as discussed in Chapter I, the Introduction, Arabic words that have not been readily used in the English language are italicized (such as *salah, sawm, zakah*). Those words that are more widely used in their transliteration into the English language are left in normal type (such as Islam, Qur'an, hijab).

Who Are You?

The 9 women who participated in this study were between the ages of 20 to 35 at the time of data collection. Women were married, divorced, or single. Some women, whether married or divorced, also had children. The women who had children had up to 3 children, and ages of the children ranged from 2 years old to 12 years old.

Participants were undergraduates, graduate students, and postgraduate students. They included both international students and national (domestic) students. Their majors or fields of study included education, engineering, geology, medicine, and psychology. Their highest level of education completed included high school, Masters, Ph.D., and D.O. In addition to being fluent in Arabic and English, a few women also spoke French, Kurdish, Spanish, and an Eastern European language. This was an articulate and thoughtful group of women, and rich data was collected from their stories.

Where Are You From?

Although all of these women were raised in predominantly Muslim countries in the Arab World, there are several layers necessary to describe where these women are from. Answering the question, "Where are you from?" can be complicated. It is always best to be specific and ask about place of birth, country or countries of origin or ancestors, where they lived growing up, what they consider their home country or countries to be, and what they state as their ethnicity.

The first layer in responding to this question of, "Where are you from?" for these women is where they are born. The second is what they consider to be their country or countries of origin, or the countries of their parents or ancestors. The third is where they lived growing up, which was for the most part what they considered to be their home country. Again, this was not

always necessarily what they considered to be their country or origin. The fourth is how they identify their ethnic background.

The women in this study were born in Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, South Eastern Europe, and the U.S. They consider their country or countries of origin as Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Syria. Growing up, for the most part, these women lived in Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, and they considered those to be their home countries. They described their ethnic background as Arab, Caucasian, Egyptian, Kurdish Iraqi, Middle Eastern, Moroccan, Palestinian, Saudi, and Sudanese.

Some women identified with the broader groups to describe their ethnic background (Arab, Caucasian, Middle Eastern). Some women chose their country or the specific region of their country to describe their ethnic background (Egyptian, Kurdish Iraqi, Moroccan, Palestinian, Saudi, Sudanese). And some women responded with both the broader group and the specific country when answering, "What is your ethnic background?" It is important to note that some women did endorse identification to more than one background, or to having parents from more than one background.

Where Have You Lived?

There are also several layers that describe the attachment, family ties, and travel of these women. The first is where they had family living at the time they were interviewed. The second is how often they were travelling back home to visit what they consider either their home country or the country where their family members were living. The third is where they had traveled for visits or studies. The fourth is where they were living immediately prior to moving to the U.S.

Women had families living in Canada, Europe, England, Egypt, France, Germany, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, U.A.E., and the U.S. Most visited where they had

other family members living (listed above) and/or their home country (Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Syria) once per year or once every two years. Some were not able to visit their home country due to war or hardship.

Some women had visited many other countries prior to coming to the U.S., and even visited the U.S. before. For a few women, the U.S. was the first place they had ever travelled to or the only country they had ever lived in outside their home country. Many of these women were very well travelled and had visited multiple countries. Women had visited from zero to five countries prior to moving to the U.S., with an average of two. The average number of countries they visited after coming to the U.S. was also 2, with the range from 0 to 10. These did not include visits back home. The list of places these women visited or travelled to outside of their home country is quite long: Canada, Eastern Europe, Egypt, England, France, Germany, Greece, Guam, Jerusalem, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Oman, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, U.A.E., U.K., U.S. This shows how much of a global perspective or worldview some of these women had.

Right before their move to the U.S., these women were living in or visiting the countries/territories of Canada, Egypt, Guam, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. This is relevant because although these women were studying in the U.S., they were sometimes led to other countries first for either voluntary or involuntary reasons. A voluntary reason, for example, was marriage to a spouse who was initially in another country prior to her moving to the U.S. for studies. An involuntary reason, for example, was escape from persecution and a temporary length of stay in another country for safety or political reasons prior to her being able to arrive in the U.S.

The women in this study had been living in the U.S. from 4 to 18 years. A few women moved to the U.S. alone and knew no one here. More of the women moved to the U.S. with their parents, siblings, spouses, and/or children. And a few women moved to the U.S. to meet parents or spouses already here. Others also had family members visit or stay initially, and later leave after they were settled in. None of the women reported that they moved here with friends, but a few reported they had either a friend living here already or extended family living in other states.

What Are Your Religious Practices?

This was a practicing group of women. They were provided with a list of religious practices on the demographic questionnaire and asked to select which practices they kept back home and then here in the U.S. All the women engaged in the religious practices of *salah* (daily prayers), *sawm* (fasting), *zakah* (charity), and reading Qur'an both back home and in the U.S. Most women had kept the religious practice of memorizing Qur'an back home and in the U.S. A few women had not kept that practice of memorizing in the U.S. And they later shared during the interviews that were regretful of that.

Most women endorsed that they would go to the mosque both back home and in the U.S. A few shared that they engaged in this practice only in the U.S. When asked whether they identified with a specific method or teaching or learning in Islam, the nine answers were: No, No/Just Muslim, Sunni/Just Sunni, Sunni/Shafia, Sunni/No specific school, Sunni Muslim/No specific teaching or *mazhab* (school of thought), Sunni/Shafia *mazhab*, and Just Muslim.

There were no apparent differences in practices of *salah, sawm, zakat,* or reading and memorizing Qur'an among these women based on whether they wore hijab or not. Some women wore hijab and some did not. No women in this study were wearing niqab (face veil) while living in the U.S. Some women had worn niqab and/or they had also worn more loose, long, or modest

clothing back home and when they initially arrived to the U.S. An example of this would be the *abaya* (outer cloak worn over one's clothing). Another example would be wearing looser fitting clothing, long and flowing shirts, and long skirts rather than pants. Another example would be wearing a longer, thigh length, or knee length shirt over one's pants, rather than a shorter or waist length shirt.

It is important to note that back home for these women, these were not just individual practices of worship. This was the culture, lifestyle, practice, and dress of their families, peers, and communities. Their families were practicing with them daily. Practicing together as a family and community included all these behaviors described. They prayed together in congregation with family at home, with peers or colleagues at work or school, and at the mosques with community. They fasted together in Ramadan and broke their fast together in family, social, and community dinners. They were taught or engaged in learning Islam and Qur'an at home, at school, and in social group gatherings.

A few of the women had also gone with their families and participated in hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca occurring during the lunar month of Dhul-Hijjah) or *umra* (visit to Mecca outside of the designated hajj pilgrimage time). As discussed in Chapter II, the Review of the Literature, this unites Muslims from around the world to one common location and for one common purpose - worship. *Asslamtu lirabbi al 'Alameen* means "I have submitted myself (as a Muslim) to the Lord of the '*Alameen* (mankind, Jinn, and all that exists)" (*Qur'an,* 2:131). Another translation is "I have submitted to the Lord of the worlds." Also, recall from Chapter II, the Arabic word, Islam, means to submit, to surrender, and to obey (A'la Mawdudi, 1986; *English Translation of the Meaning of Al-Qur'an,* 1997). Thus, following a path of Islam (of peaceful submission, surrender, and obedience to the Lord of the worlds) means having belief plus

performing the actions; following the teachings. Among the teachings are that practices of worship, such as hajj, are not done solely in isolation of others. The key here is that there is a major social component to this faith-based way of life.

Telling Their Story

Natural categories emerged from the interview questions in this study. After organizing the data and immersing myself in the data (Marshall and Rossman, 2006b), the categories became self-evident. Categories were groupings of concepts, ideas, thoughts, or salient points. The categories are briefly described using low inference descriptors, or phrasing and wording as close as possible to the participant's actual account. Quotes are also used where relevant to give a nice overall picture of the transition and adjustment narrative.

The categories were: life back home, reasons for moving, leaving home, arriving in the U.S., adjusting over time, religion and culture, education, family, social life, challenges, coping and support, changes to self and worldview, changes to image of others, advice to women, feedback. These categories are further grouped into processes in order to be described more naturally and in a story like manner. All the categories seemed to flow well and on a natural timeline of three processes: transitioning, adjusting, and succeeding.

Themes emerged from an in depth and inductive analysis of those categories listed. A theme was differentiated as not just what many or all of the women would state or share, but as a carefully thought out topic that best describes the experience of this group of women. The words that they used to explain the world around them were analyzed, categorized, reviewed in depth, placed into a story line, and then transformed to a set of themes. Referring back to Chapter III, the Methods, this is the basis of phenomenological research (Cresswell, 1998). Within the story

line, where there are themes, they are highlighted and are discussed in detail using those lowest inference descriptors, direct quotes, as often as possible.

Transitioning Process

The story line starts in this study for these women with the transitioning process. This transitioning process describes what was going on before they came to the U.S. This paints a picture of what their lives were like before they made this move. What reasons prompted them to make this life-changing move? What was it like for them when they first came? This includes categories of life back home, reasons for moving, leaving home, and arriving in the U.S. This also includes two themes surrounding complicated goodbyes and experiences upon arrival.

Life back home

Women talked about leaving and what was left behind. Some left a life that was one of comfort. For others, they left a life that had just recently become filled with danger and risk due to war and oppression. For those who came from a war-torn environment, what they recalled and spoke of was their normal life just before that. For all those who left their home countries, regardless of the precipitating factors leading to their move, they left a network of family and friends behind. And they left a community that was of the same faith and similar lifestyle and cultural practices.

Many of these women had a religious curriculum and school that included Arabic and Qur'an studies and memorization. Several women also studied some English as part of their school curriculum. And some women talked about gender separation in their schools, although not all of them went to gender separated schools. For the ones who did, they liked it. “It’s a

wonderful experience. You feel comfortable working with women like you. There are no huge boundaries or something that feels difficult."

Every woman talked about her religious practices when sharing about life back home. All the women talked about praying and fasting. "I was very serious about praying, fasting Ramadan, and I also used to fast the *sunnah* as well, Mondays and Thursdays. *Sunnah* is basically following the habits of the Prophet, *sallallahu alayhi wa sallam*." The last phrase there translates to peace and blessings be upon him. One woman shared her practices without hesitation saying:

> In Islam, there are 5 basic pillars or tenants, main practices in order to be Muslim. It's required to strive to fulfill those obligations of worship, which are:
>
> - The testimony of the faith, which is that there is one God and Prophet Muhammad is the final messenger.
> - The five prayers, so the worship prayers that are prayed during the day on a daily basis.
> - And then there is fasting, which is an obligation to fast during the holy month of Ramadan.
> - Giving charity, which is giving a certain percentage of your income yearly to certain groups of people who are poor. To people who are considered poor or need financial support.
> - And the fifth one is pilgrimage to Mecca, which is a visit once in your lifetime to Mecca to fulfill the fifth and final requirement.

Another woman smiled as she gave a detailed account of her hajj experience, which she described as a wonderful experience and her first time to go to the holy city of Mecca.

> I saw a lot of Muslim people who come from all over the world. You will see different races, White, brown, Black, every color… blonde people… *Subhan Allah*, praise to Allah, and speaking different languages and having different cultures. Even though they are different, there is one thing that is collecting them to participate in this action, event; this worship.

Most every woman also talked at length about the two religious holidays of Eid al-Fitr (festival of fast-breaking) and Eid al-Adha (festival of sacrifice; see Chapter II for a review of both). They were excited and smiling often when talking about all the activities they would do back home during the holidays.

> It looks like a family reunion for example. That day we do not fast and bring candies and give everyone, especially children, money. It's a happy day. We wear new clothes, every woman and man. It's like wedding or something. It's very fancy.

Leading up to the celebrations days before Eid al-Fitr, there was talk of the congregational prayers and *iftars*. *Iftar* is when people gather to break their fast. Recall that this Eid marks the end of the month of fasting in Ramadan. Women spoke pleasantly about performing these special *taraweeh* prayers in Ramadan, and some would attend them in the mosque. "*Taraweeh* is a prayer that is especially made at night for Ramadan, before the sunrise." *Taraweeh* are performed daily in Ramadan.

There was also talk of food and clothing preparations that were being made before the holiday. There was shopping together for new clothing to be worn and there was baking together in families and in communities. "A week or two before Eid we start preparing…buying new clothes, cleaning the house, buying new stuff, and making special goodies for Eid day." The cookie baking is extensive and also a time for bonding. "It's a huge deal. Usually extended

family or neighbors will come and help you because we make so much of it." One of the special types of cookies baked is called *klaicha.* It is a cookie that can be made with different fillings. "We have a special one for pistachios, a special one for coconuts, a special one for dates, and a special one for walnuts."

The sacrifice of the slaughter was talked about during Eid al-Adha is another part of their festivities that celebrates giving, charity, and feeding the poor. "They should make *al-adhaya*, which is to bring sheep or goats and they slaughter them and clean everything and put it in the fridge and make a huge breakfast, wearing new clothes and having a good time."

Back home for women, the Eid was a three-day celebration. They may have helped to go decorate the mosque with balloons or other decorations the night before the first day of the celebration. They may wake up early to get their fancy clothes ready and go pray in the streets with others. One woman shared that her family would start celebrating right after the men would come back from the Eid prayer. She described that they would have a big breakfast, and then

> Kids would go around. It's like Halloween in the U.S., but rather than dressing up like characters you dress up like in your best dressing, very nicely. And then you pretty much go trick or treating in different houses. Usually you give up candy or you give up money or you give up goodies.

Another woman shared, "We get money, which is great. The elder people in the family would give the younger people money." Yet another woman explained cheerfully that getting a gift of money, no matter the amount, would make you very happy. The gift giving was to children and adults alike. No matter how old you were, getting this money gift from your parents and going to buy new things was so amazing. Even if it was just candy that was bought with the money; you would be like a kid and be so happy.

Then there was all the visiting. “And then family visits. Uncles, aunts, cousins… the neighbors too… will go around and visit each other. And you visit them as well.” This was a time for vacations as well. “Sometimes my family and my mother’s family, we would go to the sea for a couple of days.” These women talked openly and happily about practicing back home with their family, their friends, and their community. “Living in a Muslim country is more like it’s part of the culture to practice. The five times a day prayer, going to *Jummah* prayer Friday, practicing Ramadan, the Eid part after Ramadan, the hajj, and all that.”

Theme 1: It’s hard to say goodbye

Leaving home was hard and complicated for every woman who shared her story of transitioning and adjusting to life and study in the U.S. This was a clear and strong theme. Not necessarily that things were all sad, but that they were hard, complicated, confusing. There was no way to predict how it would feel. Saying it will be hard is the best and most overarching descriptor. There was no other clear-cut emotion that could describe that experience. Saying goodbye raised a mixture of emotions.

There was a range of feelings of anticipation, excitement, happiness, sadness, depression, and guilt. Miserable was used quite a bit. “It was miserable. It was like my body, my soul, was left. My heart was left. I felt like a zombie.” There was a lot of crying that was spoken of. Crying by the one leaving sometimes for days or months at a time, and crying by the ones who were left. Wanting to go back home initially, or “go back to my bubble” was a feeling one or two women shared. Recall, although the women had different reasons for leaving, they all shared these similar complicated feelings. Their moving experiences were as different as leaving after a marriage to leaving for asylum without being permitted to say goodbye to family or friends and not being told where they were going.

Here are several of the expressions from different women:

I fell into deep depression, my mom as well. All my family was crying.

I cried a lot in the beginning and hated that place so much. And I kept wanting to move.

When I first came here it was so sad. I was so depressed. I stayed like that for maybe a couple of months.

I was just there at the window. I missed my friends. I missed home. It was cold here. It was April in Michigan. It was raining.

Another woman remembers calling her mother by cell phone and her mother was crying. She and her sibling who moved with her were very close to their mother, so it was actually like they broke her heart. They were so happy to leave at first and their mother was really not.

We just told her, 'We are fine, we are fine, we are happy!' And actually, one of my aunts went to visit my mother at home while she was crying, and they told her, 'Please be quiet. They are happy and you are the only one who is sad!'

This woman described that although she didn't cry initially, she started crying about four months later and complaining a lot to her mother. "I starting to cry and make movies." A movie in this reference means theatrics, drama. As in, she was making a film. In the Arabic language, this is a common phrase or expression when someone wants to describe that they were being melodramatic.

The feelings surrounding the goodbyes were described as difficult. And there was a direct impact on every family.

It was difficult for them (my parents) because they had to go against the norms, against the cultural practices and beliefs in Middle East. I mean there were a lot of people that were just surprised that my parents would let me move to the U.S. alone.

Although families were incredibly supportive of their daughters gaining higher education, other families or community members may not have supported that decision. Women were concerned about their families and they wanted for their families to be able to have good things to say about their accomplishments here. Thus, be a reminder of their purpose for leaving their families and their home.

A woman remembered her late grandmother crying and saying, "You all go and you never come back!" This was an intense emotional statement that this woman never forgot, because it hit her that although her family had planned to go back, they hadn't. There were expressions of guilt for some who had families that were living in an environment of war or revolution. "Every day I was watching the news, everything that was happening there. And it was making me more sad and depressed." "People are dying every day, and the bombs…you know, the country is almost destroyed."

For others, there was also guilt about feeling happy. "Part of your heart feels so happy, I will be free. And the other part feels selfish to leave the one who you love just for yourself to feel happy." Her mother was described as holding back her tears for her daughter's well-being. "I know that she was in pain and she was crying inside herself, but she forced herself to be strong and to give me some of this power from inside her to me. So, to make everything easier."

Although there was a sense of heaviness leaving everyone and much crying, there was also an excitement, and desire for independence, improvement, and learning. One student explains that she liked to work and she was excited to start a new life. Another that it was kind of exciting going on a ride and crossing the border into a different country. And yet another that she was very excited to go and attend a Friday prayer here for the first time.

Reasons for leaving home

The reasons that women self-reported for leaving home provide a more in depth description of their experience. Further describing the reasons women gave in their own words for leaving home is helpful to paint the picture of their transition process and get to know their mentalities better. All of the women who left their homes in the Arab world in Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, or Syria continued their studies here in the U.S. Though, there were multiple reasons and motivating factors involved in their move. This was touched on earlier in the section on Where Have You Lived? They may have left home only for better educational opportunities. They may have left to marry and to start a new life, and education may have been just one part of that new life. They may have left for family improvement or out of family circumstance. They may have had little choice as a refugee of war.

One may wonder, for the voluntary moves, why they would undergo this major transition considering how complicated it was and all that they were leaving behind.

> There is something in you that is pushing you to learn and know new stuff, new science. And, you know, to feel updated. And you can't do that in the same place, in your country. So, you have to try to move. That's it.

Coming to study in the U.S. was described as a mark of high status and achievement.

> Students who graduate from United States have more advantages than other countries. So that is why I came here. For example, when you come to apply to the university as a professor, they mention the countries you graduated from. United States, United Kingdom, Brazil, Australia. They prefer America. America is number one.

Parents were encouraging and supportive of their daughters pursuing higher education. “My parents always wanted me to come to the U.S. for an education.”

Coming to the U.S. was also seen as a way to experience life. The degree was not the motivating factor, but rather "just a way to come here and just wanted to experience the life."

> Since I was a kid watching *Full House* that was like my dream to go there and just experience the life. And you know, everybody's talking about the U.S.A. and Europe, especially the U.S.A. and the education over there.

For a family that was given asylum status and brought here by the U.S. Army, coming was an escape from persecution. "It was kind of required for my dad's safety, because if he would have stayed behind he probably would have been executed by the old regime." For those whose countries were at war or in a revolution when they left, the motivating factors in their move were certainly different. In all though, the pursuit of higher education was a goal and a desire.

Arriving in the U.S.

Women spoke of that first experience getting on and off the plane to the U.S. Once they reached the airport and the plane took off, they began to relax and their minds became busy with all the new things to see. There was a lot to see and do once arriving to the U.S.

This part of the transition process had a different tone, one that was busy with the hustle and bustle of daily life. Women were tuned in to all the changes and differences in the new environment. When they first arrived, there seemed to be a definite shift in focus to all the nuances of daily living. "I think I was very focused on the new life I had, that I wasn't paying much attention to what I was leaving behind." They described that with all that was going on, they started to forget about all the complicated goodbyes and gave their attention to what was ahead.

Women were busy with their surroundings. They were busy with things like finding a place to live, a place for childcare, and places to get their groceries. They had to prepare for schooling and study for entrance exams. They were meeting new people, learning the system, and noticing the differences around them.

> The first thing I wanted to learn was the subway and the stations, and how do you go around and take one train to another. For me...it was just… I want to learn as much as I can and have fun.

Even for a woman who had been able to move to another country before and thought she could do this with ease, moving to a big city in the U.S. was still a major transition. “It was a whole new beast.” “It was like a jungle.” Women were encouraged by their families to go and explore their surroundings. Not to stay inside all day, and to go see the country. Back home, their parents may have been worried about their safety if they were traveling. Here in the U.S., the situation was different in that culturally it was seen as more accepted for a woman to go out or travel alone, or with just friends. Thus, they were encouraged to get out, to travel and see places, to socialize, and to go have fun within the boundaries of their faith.

Some of the differences women initially noticed when they started to get out were really interesting. They noticed that houses were made of wood, the supermarkets were all indoors, and the public transportation was calmer and not crowded. They also noticed that here there were services to accommodate the blind and disabled, such as guide dogs and transportation assistance. They noticed that there were a lot of automatic cars and not manual cars like back home. “The cars are huge here! People actually drive really big cars.”

They also started to notice when interacting with people that here one does not address others by their titles or by using their last names. They do not call them with “Ms., Mr., Ommu

(Uncle), or *Khalti* (Aunt)." "I feel that people here don't place a lot of emphasis or there isn't a lot value in that. I would say that's one difference I noticed in communicating with others." Another woman was lightheartedly explaining how she noticed the rate of speech here.

> And the other thing I noticed here in the U.S.… the Americans spoke so fast, 60 miles per hour! I am not kidding! Now I am used to it, but back then maybe I would get 2 words out of the 100 words they spoke. They talk really fast.

A different woman laughed wholeheartedly while explaining how she noticed the driving system.

> Getting out of the airport… seeing all traffic lights… and how there is no police officer or anything and people actually follow it. In the Arab world, you have a police officer and people still do not follow the directions! That's a miracle, just the traffic light. *Subhan Allah*, *yaani*, no one is watching you. I don't know…I just for the longest time I was trying to figure out where is the police officer?

Subhan Allah is a commonly spoken phrase and a worship phrase. The meaning is glory to Allah, and the phrase is often used in excitement and awe. *Yaani* is equivalent to usage of the word 'like' as an informal conjunction in English. So, an English equivalent may be, "Glorious is God! Like, no one is watching you."

Theme 2: Just like in the movies?

There was a clear concept that emerged from the women sharing their experiences upon first arrival. This was one of expectations versus reality. For some, their expectations from watching media and film did not meet the reality of their first hand and real life experience. And for others, they did find what they had always dreamt of seeing. Here is how someone explained how the movies had influenced her:

> Actually, before I came to United States, I had two views. First, when I used to see some movies or TV shows, usually I think of American as very nice, fancy. Or sometimes in a negative aspect, they are scary, dangerous. It's like the life in California; that's my perception about American people.

The movies and TV shows that are shown overseas are often those that are most popular here in the U.S. They show scenes of big cities and sky rises and ocean views. Different women who did not find quite what they had expected went on to share:

> It was snowing a lot, so I was kind of disappointed. Where is the beautiful U.S.A. that I heard about?
>
> I was thinking that every state would look just like New York or San Francisco, like the big cities…that it's going to be beautiful. Well, Michigan is not that beautiful… I thought most of America looked like that, big cities, but it's not.
>
> I was basically shocked, because I thought I would see sky rises and tall buildings, just what you see in the movies.

Then there were those women who, upon comparison, found exactly what they had hoped to see or even more. They found that everything here was so nice, so clean, and so organized.

> When we just saw the United States, not the United States, but even the view from the window of the airplane, we said, 'Wow! It's as if we are in an American movie. This is real!' The buildings and the trees… we never saw this in reality before. We found, you know, because it was our first time, so many things, that this is the best place ever. This is the States! Like the buildings… everything is organized, everything is clean.

Another woman further described this feeling of being in a movie with all the high quality imagery and change in surroundings.

> It was like in a movie. I saw high quality cars. I remember when the shuttle came to the airport and was starting loud music. It was my first time to get in a bus like this and hearing this loud music. So, I felt we are in a movie right now. And there was rain at that time. I was excited. I went to the hotel and took out my camera and started to record everything.

Women said different things about what they experienced with people here when they first arrived. Once again, their perceptions were influenced by what they had seen in the media. They were making their comparisons to this. Some women thought that the people here were not going to be nice, and then they found that some people were actually very nice. They were surprised that people were nicer than they had thought, and there was more diversity than they had expected. There was a whole spectrum of people, not like they had seen in the media stereotypes.

> I thought that America is the land of freedom, and everyone drinks and has sex and does whatever they want. But it's not like that; there is a little bit of everything. And there are conservative people, very conservative people. There are people that are very liberal. There is the whole spectrum.

Several women expressed that the people here were very good, were so nice and friendly, and were very, very helpful. Also, that they say sorry and thank you a lot. Even that they found people here who were quite supportive of them.

> When I first moved here, I didn't expect Americans to be this way. I came from a country that had a war with U.S. So, coming here… I don't know… I found there are other people here, nice people here, and supportive people here. Not everyone is a George W. Bush!

Another woman had thought because of what she had heard about America, that people might treat her badly. She found that people didn't stare at her and that was a good thing.

> I was worried that… okay… they may deal with us in a bad way because of our religion, because of our scarf, because of our clothes. I never saw that. I mean it's impossible to find someone staring because of how you look like. They expect that you will never stare at them, whatever they are. This is good. This is the freedom.

Others expected or thought that people here were actually going to be very nice and they felt, in their experience, that the people were not as nice as they had thought. They directly expressed that people were not as nice, or that people were more cold and dry than they had expected them to be. They expressed that they were used to a friendlier environment where people smiled often and said please and thank you. "You say thank you and people are like 'Mmhmm.' … I was like, 'What?'" This woman was describing her surprise that when she would go out and say thank you to people, and they did not respond as she expected with much warmth or affection. They would just acknowledge by making the "mmhmm" sound that connotes "yes", "ok", or "yeah", and she was caught off guard by that reaction.

These women were comparing the reality of their experience upon arrival with their expectations from media and film prior to coming. Once again, sometimes it was a favorable comparison, and sometimes it was a negative one. Though they were all comparing America to what they had thought it would be like. Initial experiences and perceptions upon arrival did end up changing over time. With time and more exposure, women developed a new understanding and image of the U.S.

> In the U.S. it's not all these movies that you see Chicago and Detroit and New York and Los Angeles. It is not only the U.S. There is more in the U.S. than Chicago and New York and Los Angeles.

Adjusting Process

With time, women developed a deeper understanding of the differences between countries. The second part of the story line in this study and for these women was the adjusting process. This is the description of their experience of adjusting here over time in all those life areas. These are the categories of adjusting over time, religion and culture, education, family, social life, and challenges.

Theme 3: I miss this

Participants spoke longingly about life back home, and about the culture of togetherness. In the section on Life Back Home, they had talked about their families doing everything together. For every single woman, her social life revolved around family and neighbors. Family would practice together, take vacations together, eat together, and sometimes live in the same building together with extended family. School friends and neighbors would walk around together, shop together, bake together, eat together, study together, and play sports together.

This culture of visiting and togetherness and closeness was so strong. "You tend to be very close in your relationships when you are friends with a Middle Eastern." Women explained that they would all live together in the same city, so they were all connected. "It was a different kind of social life that we had." Women missed their families, their social life, and the culture of community that they shared. "Relationships here are very different." There was this climate and culture of giving and warmth in their relationships with other Muslims and Arabs.

Relationships here were described as more cold and dry, and classmates were not as social as those in Arab countries. “As I learn, it’s very robotic here. There is a lack of emotions here. This is my understanding.” The same woman described what she meant by robotic and a lack of emotions.

> I never walked by myself. And when I used to walk by myself to go to my friend’s house, my leg, my body, would be so stiff to walk by myself. My friends and me would hold hands, and with my dad or my mom or any family. I miss the touching. Here it’s very cold in relationships. Everything is inappropriate and understood wrong. It’s dry.

Not only did these women miss their culture of togetherness, but they also missed the physical aspects of that culture. It was normal for women to walk hand in hand in the streets. It was normal for parents to hold their adult child’s hand or to link arms at the elbow and walk together that way. This was a form of closeness and bonding. Another woman expressed her preference for the social life back home. “I would say I like the social life there. You feel everyone is around you. You feel the family love. Here, it’s just so dead. No social life at all.”

Women spoke about how their holidays and celebrations were more extensive back home, and they clearly missed those celebrations. They said that the holiday celebrations here were the biggest difference from back home. Recall that religious holidays of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha were a big deal back home. Recall how extensive all the activities were and how the women looked forward to it. One woman had described it as a family reunion. There were three-day celebrations filled with worship acts, family visitations, food, and monetary gifts.

In the U.S., women would try to celebrate with friends, but working was also likely. Back home working was unlikely.

> It's really fun; the Eid is a three-day Eid. Not only one or two prayers and you come home and you have a half a day here pretty much. Over there you have three days and people visit and it's nice.

For women, this part of their social life was very important and dear to them.

As described by one participant in the section on Life Back Home, practicing is ingrained into the fabric of the culture in a Muslim country. The practices are not distinct from the culture; they form the culture. They are the daily life, and activities revolve around that. Women missed this. It was part of their social support network.

> There were always activities. I went to the mosque regularly, but I went during Ramadan for the night prayers. But during the week there were always a lot of religious gatherings. But it was mainly all women. I was involved in leadership activities.

Back home, women felt more encouragement with practicing, such as praying in congregation. This practice is one that would bring people together instead of praying alone. Women felt that was something they lost a little bit over here. Women felt that being alone sometimes is not good, because you do not have someone to help encourage you to practice.

Recall that memorizing Qur'an was the one practice that some women endorsed they did not keep regularly here in the U.S. One woman shared that back home there were people to help you do that. Further, that because no one knows you here, it is not the same encouragement. You are also not held to same accountability. No one will judge you here, and you can do whatever you want. "If you make a mistake, you can see it in the people's eyes and you will get your punishment when you go back home. But here, no one will say anything." In this sense, she is not talking about physical punishment. She is describing the feeling that one would have of shame should they not stay on track with their practices. And in her description, there is a desire

for that. In other words, she missed having others around to hold her accountable and encourage her or push her to the good.

Women missed this collective and communal sense of responsibility for the other. They would take care of each other and show generosity towards one another. The faith encourages them to do acts of good will for each other. One woman talks about this in her hajj at Mecca.

> People become more generous. Some people do not participate in the same worship. They just come to bring charity. The weather there was so hot. So, they bring like juices, water for free, and sometimes food. Different services just for free. And they do not want any reward, because they believe the reward will come from God.

Once again, the warmth, giving, physical touching, friendliness, and connection they experienced back home with family and friends, and neighbors and community, was something they missed here. Being on their own was the most difficult, and having people around was what they missed the most. “To be by myself, it’s challenging.” This woman shared that the first three years she would spend the whole day by herself, and that back home she did not even walk by herself.

For another woman, the first year was most lonely. “I was like feeling so lonely and I didn’t know anyone. I wasn’t going out very much, only for the super market or the mall or stuff like that.” She went on to describe how she, as a shyer individual, especially missed the social life back home and how that affected her.

> I am not a very social person myself, but of course when have your family around you talk to them all the time; you do different things with them. But since I came here, because I don’t have anyone, it was so difficult and most of the time I feel so lonely and depressed.

This woman mentioned that she did have family here, and there might be smaller family visits here when the weather outside was good. Unfortunately, even these visits were rare because everyone was busy. “First, everybody is busy. Second, like, you don’t have many people you know.” The reasons she gave were again part of this cold, dry, busy lifestyle here in the U.S. She missed her network of family support and the availability people would have for each other back home. “Living alone is not that easy. Living away from your family is not that easy.”

Leaving their families behind and staying here was not easy. Recall that even for those who moved with some of their family members, they still left a network of extended family, friends, neighbors, and a faith-based community behind. Particularly having children here made women miss their mothers and sisters more. “In difficult times, especially when your kids are sick and you are sick, I always felt that I wish my mom was here and my sisters were here.” Friends here did help one another, but that sense of availability once again was a loss. Women shared that their friends would have their own families that they needed to take care of.

This far-reaching communal responsibility and availability of women to help one another in childcare and in sickness was missed here. One woman shared she did not take care of her health as much because of this, and even did not have anyone to help encourage her to eat. Recall that eating together was part of the culture back home and one typically did not eat alone. Eating alone was a major adjustment, as expressed by a different woman:

> I was used to kind of having all these people around me, family and friends. I go out somewhere and we are together, like 10 people in a group going places. And I kind of had to get used to doing that alone. And I remember feeling very sad for myself… Like, ‘Oh my God, I am eating in a food court alone!’ It just felt very lonely and sad.

The environment back home was ideal both culturally and systemically for family, friends, and neighbors to spend a lot of time with one another. People made themselves available to each other. Back home, women felt that they had "a little community that supported each other." And the support extended to many areas of life, including academics, religious practices, childcare, healthcare, social outings, cooking, and eating.

Plethora of challenges

There were challenges that were faced by women that were not experienced by most or all women, but are important to give some attention to. Various challenges that women shared were dealing with siblings, roommate conflicts, transportation, finding prayer spaces, language and the education system, the drinking culture, finding marriage partners, clothing and dress, and discrimination. Each of these challenges will be briefly described in this section.

Siblings

A stress or hardship was related to dealing with siblings who traveled with women from their country of origin to live and study in the U.S. The hardship was in managing younger siblings. This was particularly a challenge when the younger sibling was of the opposite gender. "They feel they are the master and now they are responsible. My father told my brother to take care of me, and now he feels he is my father."

The role of the eldest sibling is commonly to be a caretaker, and the role of a male sibling of any age is often to be a protector. When the eldest sibling is not a male and when the siblings travel to the U.S. together, this may present a unique challenge for women in managing multiple roles. She is in the role of the elder with potentially more experience and knowledge in some areas, yet the younger brother has taken on the responsibility or role of the protective father.

Roommates

Further challenges shared were adjusting to roommates who were not from the same religious background or ethnic background. For one woman, she had a difficult time being assigned to a roommate in the dorms. She was on a floor that did not allow overnight male visitors; her roommate and others broke this rule. She felt uncomfortable reporting the situation. She did start to like living here in the U.S. more after she no longer had to deal with that situation that conflicted with her cultural and spiritual practices.

Transportation

Another challenge was in transportation. Public transportation for Muslim women living in the U.S. was described as much less accessible than public transportation in their home countries.

> I remember I was chasing busses a lot! I was like, when does the bus come? I didn't even know there was a schedule; I didn't know how to check it online. I just thought I would wait and the bus will come! A professional bus chaser! I figured out and started writing all that down. And then I figured out I can check it on the Internet before I go out. Progress.

As she described, public transportation here was not as readily available, or as frequently available, as what some women may have been accustomed to. The assumption was that the buses would arrive regularly and frequently; however, in the U.S. in many areas busses only arrive on scheduled times.

A few women felt that not having a car was a barrier to finding friends, being comfortable, and socializing more often. “If you don’t have a car, you can’t basically go

anywhere. So, it was a barrier to do anything kind of." Those who did not drive regretted not having a car. Yet another student explained, "If I had to redo this experience, the first thing I would do - I would get a car."

Those who initially did not drive and learned to drive and/or purchased a car later expressed the relief and freedom they felt afterwards. A woman expressed, "I always felt that we all as a family depend on our dad because we couldn't drive. So, the first thing I wanted to have is freedom…coming to the U.S.A in this huge country, continent…not depending on anybody." Similarly, one woman shared that driving was one of the most helpful things that took her out of the challenging phase she went through her first year. She felt it gave her more independence and less reliance on people. Having reliable transportation for a female was described as essential. "You have to have a car for survival in the U.S. If you need to go to the hospital… if you need groceries… if you need anything… you need a car."

Prayer space

Women also struggled in the U.S. to find a place to pray on campus. A woman questioned, "Why can't they make one in each building?" She explained, "Men can pray everywhere, it's ok. But for me, I have to keep looking for an empty room or an empty hallway to pray in." It was challenging for her trying to get back and forth between classes in different buildings. It could take up to 30 minutes to travel to the mosque from campus. This student expressed that this really made her suffer every day and every prayer time. She continued:

> I think the biggest problem is the prayer room. I can't think of any other thing. I mean it's ok to read Qur'an in the labs or anything. No one says anything. No one bothers you. The scarf is ok everywhere; our clothes are ok everywhere. Only the prayer time is the most important thing for us.

This difficulty finding a reasonably nearby place to pray inside educational buildings was a challenge for other woman as well. One student made an effort to address this at her institute for higher education. She shared that she did not find support for this. She disclosed that she went through the appropriate channels, but an on campus prayer space was still not provided. "I tried to ask for a prayer place and it was not received. They did not do anything about it. It was really brushed over."

Yet another woman shared that it took her time to adjust and learn that she could pray in a public library or in her car. At first, she had thought she could only pray at home and she described her struggle with this. "You always felt horrible. I realized that problem. I was missing all my prayers." She explained that would have to make up her daily prayers at home and all at nighttime.

> All I'm saying is that first three years… I don't know exactly… I didn't know I can practice openly. But now I know I can go to the university library and pray right here between the books, or I learned I would pray openly between the people. I don't feel scared or ashamed.

A fourth woman discussed the prayer space issue in her job environment. "Now in my part time job, I can't pray. When I come back home, I pray." Some woman may have felt comfortable praying in public. Other women did not feel comfortable performing this act of worship in front of other people and required a private place to do so.

Academia

The differences in the education system in the U.S. and in their home countries were significant for some women. For other women, these differences were minimal. Differences were reported to be less when women had already studied at the high school or college level with an

academic system structured similarly to that the U.S. Challenges were also reported to be less when women were already fluent in the English language.

For several women, the focus on individualism was a challenge in academia. They felt that there is more independent study here than back home, that the students had to do a lot more. Coming from a collectivist community, women felt it was a very different culture here. Back home,

> there is always a person who tells you the ins and outs of each class. I am one of those people who I did well, but I always kind of relied on someone who was more organized than I was.

This woman realized the difference with the academic system here and back home. Back home, she had support and structure from her more organized peers. Back home, she was instructed which topics to study and read. Here, she felt she needed to do her own research and find her own information. "You learn how to tailor to your professors, but there was a lot of independent figuring stuff out on your own."

The differences and challenges associated with being on time were also raised by women. One woman shared her concern about being perceived negatively as both a Muslim and as a student, "I was initially so worried that I will be perceived as that Muslim person who came late to class." Another woman explained in more detail how the academic system, and system of life in the U.S. in general, was different in regard to their perception of time.

> Another difference is time… for example, respect for time. You know how we tend to joke about Middle Eastern time versus American time? Basically, here, people value time. Even if you have five or ten minutes, you know, on your hands, people value your time basically. Back home, I am not saying that they don't value your time, but there isn't

much respect for time. If you have an appointment at 11, its very acceptable for people to show up at noon for example. Another example is like here you make appointments. Back home, when you make an appointment, you do not give a specific time. You say, 'Ok, I will come over in the afternoon' or 'I will come over this evening.' You don't give them a specific time, so evening could mean like 6 or it could mean 10 at night.

While independent study and stricter expectations on timeliness were challenges, there was another area of the academic system that a few women spoke about more in regard to difficulties. Among those women in this study who found differences in the academic system to be challenging, their greater struggle was in developing competency of the English language. This challenge will be given some individual attention.

Language

Several women experienced challenges in adjusting to using English versus Arabic. Once again, other women did not feel this was a challenge, as they had already been studying and speaking in English prior to their move to the U.S. Women who felt they had a strong background in English or developed their competency over time still worried about how they would be perceived, getting clarification, and their accent. "Maybe with some students I always wish if I didn't have the accent, but things were ok, it was not as difficult as I thought it was going to be." Culture, not only language, played a major role in their understanding of social and educational concepts.

I still have some barriers about culture or the language. For the language, maybe it depends on me. In some classes, for the culture, when they speak… I just feel that I am isolated. I don't know what you are talking about. But usually people, my friends or students, are nice. They are willing to try to explain things to you.

Most women who perceived language as a challenge only perceived this initially, then felt that as time went on this challenge improved or went away all together. Some women stated that using English was only a barrier for the first two weeks, first two or three months, and others for the first year or two. “My English… it was so weak. I had to literally look up every other word with the dictionary to translate what I am reading.” Though this woman learned to adjust, she explained that education in the U.S. was difficult in the beginning because of English fluency.

As explained, women arrived with varying levels of competency in English. Some with a strong background, and others had never spoken any English prior to arrival in the U.S. Even those who felt they spoke English very well growing up and in school were self-conscious about being different and about how they may be perceived. One woman described that she used to be very outspoken, however, here she felt very anxious at first, “My face would turn red and I wouldn’t be able to speak.”

Another woman explained further that as her English language skills improved over the course of two or three years, things got better and she felt fine using English. She recognized that for her, the language had a huge impact.

> Now, actually, I can understand and do better in my academic work. Before I went to school, but I didn’t know what was going on around me. Now I have a better understanding of what’s going on and what’s required from me.

The experience of becoming truly bilingual and switching interchangeably to communication in Arabic versus English was also recognized. This was most clear when thinking began to occur in English and when it took time to adjust to speaking full time in the

native language (Arabic) during visits back home. Surrounding oneself with friends and family who only spoke Arabic was seen as a detriment when trying to improve English language skills.

Drinking culture

In addition to struggling in adjustment of the academic and linguistic culture, some women also experienced a challenge in socializing. Specifically, in attempting to connect with friends and colleagues in a culture that emphasizes drinking as a social norm. Female students shared that they had wanted to be a part of the in-group in their classes; however, they felt ostracized due to not participating in activities outside of the classroom with professors or classmates where alcohol would be consumed. This meant not attending some professional conferences, dinners, social hours, and gatherings. Feeling left out and feeling a loss of professional networking was reported.

A woman described that it was hard for her to find support because "I think it was harder for me to be part of that in group because some of the culture." "People would party together, would drink together, and be classmates and support each other." Because she was not in those circles, she felt she was not 'in' on getting the summaries, notes, and networking they shared. Another woman explained that she truly did not enjoy their social activities of going out drinking, because she does not drink. "Drinking is a big social thing. It's like… go drink on the weekend. And I don't do that. And I don't blend in in that part."

The woman who shared that it was hard for her to find supported elaborated further. She described an experience of compartmentalized socialization due to the drinking culture:

> I remember asking a lot of people what they do on their weekends. 'Oh, can I join for this?' And a lot of the responses, a lot of the activities, having to do with drinking. 'Oh, we drink; we get hammered.' And I was like, 'Do you guys do anything else?' So that

was an initial barrier for me because I didn't want to just socialize with Arabs or Muslims, I wanted to socialize with anybody I meet.

So, I felt like, 'Ok, what am I supposed to do?'

She described that what came out of this was that she would socialize only at school with classmates, at the mosque with Muslims, and at home talking with her family. "I was aware of social activities going on around me. But I stopped pursuing them. I told myself that I would probably not be comfortable anyways."

Marriage search

Women who were single or divorced experienced a challenge in their romantic life. "There are more barriers for Muslims for marriage here" they said. Women reported an absence of suitable marriage partners. They reported difficulty in the process of finding a marriage partner. This was somewhat similar to the prior challenge of navigating personally and professionally in a drinking culture, in that women felt the culture here was not congruent with their needs. They felt that there were more barriers and obstacles here in the U.S. when searching for a compatible spouse. Some of those barriers or obstacles shared were a) there were not many, if any, romantic partners available from the same cultural background, b) "we are very picky here", and c) "depending on your gender, background, and age, it's really difficult to get married."

One woman explained in detail what it meant that people are pickier when it comes to marriage here in the U.S. compared to back home. She explained that in the U.S. during the marriage search, Muslims are not only looking at the things that they look at overseas (such as appearance, weight, height, etc.), but they are also looking at what country the potential candidate is from, whether they are Sunni or Shiite, and whether they speak the same languages

or not. They may want someone who is only from their own country, from their own village, or even their own age. Also, they may want someone who speaks the language of the family in addition to English, or someone who is wealthy. This woman definitively expressed that from a religious perspective those things should not matter as long as they share the same religion. And that what should matter is whether he or she is a good Muslim and practicing.

Clothing and dress

Responding to questions regarding clothing and dress, in particular responding to criticism regarding hijab and niqab, were challenging experiences for some women. One woman recalls being told, "You don't know that you are being oppressed, but you are." This was in reference to wearing hijab. She also recalled someone once told her, "I like watching you struggle." This was in reference to her explaining her beliefs and practices. She further questioned whether because of her hijab, others were not socializing with her. "I don't know if people were sometimes hesitant because I was wearing the hijab. 'Oh, we don't know what this is, we are not going to invite her.'"

Another woman shared mixed responses she experienced from those who looked at her, "In regard to hijab, some people feel its ok, and some people, when I walk in the street or go to the mall, some people just look at me weird looks, but I don't care."

Yet another woman expressed how it did actually bother her that she had been told prior to coming to the U.S. that wearing niqab would be accepted here, and her experience was that it was not accepted at all.

> Before I came, I started to educate myself how people think of hijab… of how people think of people from my country. They told me it's fine to wear hijab and especially it's fine to wear niqab. And I came with dark hijab, with niqab, and I went to this state, but

there it wasn't that easy. People start to look and stare; sometimes they take their children away. So, it was hard, the niqab, it wasn't that good or easy in this state. I'm not sure about other states."

How women dealt with negative statements, criticisms, and experiences of discrimination will be described in a later theme on respect and understanding.

Other women shared varied challenges in regard to dress. For example, it was an adjustment seeing women in the US not dressed modestly or not covering. Seeing women wearing shorts was shocking for some, even more so seeing the way women dressed in academic settings. "It was wild because the way girls dressed. I went to all girls' school where girls dressed in only uniforms. And here they wear high heels… low cut shirts… that was kind of different for me."

For others, the clothing and dress style in the U.S. impacted their own choices on clothing and dress. This was sometimes associated with feeling pressured and sometimes associated with being ok with the changes. For the woman who discussed wearing niqab, she chose not to wear it after some time based upon her experiences here. She stated that although she was sad she lost it, she felt comfortable with that decision. She felt that it was better to wear niqab in Islam, but that it was not obligatory as the hijab alone was. She stated she would continue to wear hijab in the US and to wear niqab in her home country where it was freely accepted.

This woman felt that her niqab was scaring people and hindering communication. "So, I came here to study, not to scare people." She did not like the feeling of American students avoiding her or seeming like they did not see her. In order to improve communication with others, she made the choice to remove only the face veil of the niqab that covers the nose and mouth. She further explained that some students do wear niqab and she would not want to

discourage anyone from wearing it by sharing this experience, but for her, it was a personal thing.

> Because of the communication, I think it's hard. And even my voice is not that loud. Usually when I talk or when I speak, people come close to me to try to understand me. So even for that, the niqab… no… it doesn't work for me. And maybe it works for other students and they can handle their stuff like that.

For another woman, she felt that she had dressed more conservatively in her home country and felt pressured to dress less conservatively in the U.S. She felt a sense of both shame and judgment from others in talking about hijab.

> When it comes to modesty and wearing hijab, I was definitely more conservative before. I don't like to think that. Because sometimes I feel the pressure of being a woman and being judged by your peers. So, there is small stuff that I wouldn't have done that I do now. I think I used to wear more loser baggier clothes before. I think I was more conscious of my hair not showing before, and now kind of compromising a little bit with that. I don't know if it's a part of my work with my faith, or if it's the influence of the messages from the environment.

Being questioned about hijab felt challenging, minimizing, and angering at times for this woman. She felt, once again, that this challenge had an impact on how she dressed and also on how she felt about the slight changes she made to her clothing and dress choices.

> Sometimes when I go out, I feel like I would wear a hat instead of my hijab or the traditional scarf way. Because I don't want the first impression that people have or the reaction that they have or judgment is based on their thoughts about me being Muslim. Because ethnically, racially, I don't think I immediately can be identified as Arab. So, I

think with the hijab, it makes it for sure. So, I think sometimes I was a little disappointed with myself with that shift.

Discrimination

It is important to remember the time period, the political environment, and the media image of Muslims when discussing discrimination. The women in this study were interviewed not long after the attacks in Paris at the Charlie Hebdo magazine occurred in early January 2015 by ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), also known as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). And not long after women in this study were interviewed, a married Muslim couple and a sibling were shot in the head by a disgruntled non-Muslim neighbor in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in mid-February 2015. This attack made international news and touched many Muslims living in the U.S. personally due to the execution style of the killings.

About ten months later in early December of 2015, a mass shooting occurred in San Bernardino, California. The shooters this time were a married couple that identified as Muslim and targeted the coworkers of the government company that the husband worked at. This event also made international news and also touched many Muslims living in the U.S. personally. There was confusion about the unusual nature of a married couple both taking up arms. There was also a backlash towards Islam and Muslims in the media, as the shooters were identified as Muslim.

Women in this study were interviewed prior to Donald Trump running for the 2016 presidential election. During his run for presidency, Trump told Americans that as president he would kill the family members of terrorists, not allow Muslims to enter the U.S., deport Muslims who are in the U.S., and would have Muslims carry special ID badges. Another mass shooting occurred in June of 2016 in Florida at a nightclub with predominantly members of the LGB

community. The mass shooter was a U.S. born Afghani male who was identified as a Muslim and a terrorist. Reports shared a history of mental illness and abusive behaviors, and questioned whether the shooter struggled with his own sexual orientation as he frequently drank at that nightclub. Although the shooter was U.S. born, Trump called for the U.S. to take steps to protect itself against allowing Muslims to enter the U.S.

This shooting also came very shortly after one of the first very positive media portrayals of Islam. This was the globally watched and publicized funeral service held for the Muslim Black American celebrity, Muhammad Ali. He chose the name of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, when he reverted to Islam. He was beloved around the world, as was the name he chose. He was an activist, a boxer, a heavyweight champion, and a global voice for Islam.

These events that all occurred both before and after women were interviewed likely impacted their reports and their experiences of discrimination. Events that occurred recently after their interviews could have changed the reports and experiences they had just shared. Their views and experiences certainly could have been impacted in both the reporting of and the experiencing of discrimination because of the changes in the media and the public image.

For women in this study, there was a commonality and overarching mindset surrounding the word discrimination itself. This was that regardless of the way they verbalized or defined the difficult experiences they may have had with others, they usually gave others the benefit of the doubt, or an excuse, for the negative and oppressive behavior. This meaning making or framework of how women view their oppressors will be discussed in more detail in the succeeding process under the theme on respect and understanding. Described here will be the challenging experiences women shared.

Some women clearly reported experiencing discrimination, and used the word discrimination. Some women reported that they had never experienced discrimination. Other women reported negativity directed towards them, but did not identify as feeling discriminated against. Those who experienced a struggle with clothing and dress did not always necessarily identify this as discrimination, or as having a negative impact on their access to services and resources. As discussed in the prior area on clothing and dress, women reported negative attitudes and perceptions attributed to them, as well as negative comments stated directly to them.

One woman stated that although she did not feel she experienced intolerance or discrimination, she also did not identify herself as Muslim to strangers for safety reasons.

> Sometimes, someone would approach me in the street. Oh, I remember this happening, a neighbor, and asking me if I was a Muslim. And I'm sure he had good intentions, but I was afraid to say yes, because I didn't know. I didn't know his intentions. Like, it may be good; it may be bad. But, I decided I don't want to answer, because I don't know this person. I don't want to disclose personal information. And he may be a very good person; he may be a very bad person.

For this woman, she believed that language and hijab could be a source of difficulty of adjustment, but that she did not experience this because her English was understandable and she did not wear hijab. She further stated that she heard from others that they did have experiences of intolerance and discrimination, and especially when their English was not easy to understand.

Another woman felt that regardless of where you are from or your religion, there are good and bad people that will treat you differently. She stated that she knew that others have had bad experiences, and she felt that, “anywhere we can find the same…it’s not because of our

religion or where we are from. Even in our countries, we can find the same. Some good people and other tough people." For other women in this study, negative experiences in customer service, job searching, and in airport security screenings were three areas that were clearly identified as feeling oppressive and labeled as discrimination.

Two women shared their experiences questioning discrimination when receiving customer service in a retail setting or a banking setting. One woman shared that in a retail setting transaction, this was the first time she wondered about or maybe felt that another person withheld something from her due to her background. What she felt was withheld was good customer service. "I was in mall, and I went to a department store, and the lady asked me a question and when I started to speak, she immediately changed her tone of voice after hearing my accent." When she returned to the store, they could not locate the dress she had put on hold with that lady. She questioned whether the lady hid it from her for some reason.

> That's probably the only time when I felt discriminated against. To be honest, I don't know if it has anything to do with me because I look European. I don't look Middle Eastern, and I don't wear the hijab. So, I don't know if that makes any difference. But I notice that sometimes people look at me funny when I speak, but I wouldn't call that discriminated against or anything like that. Maybe they are just curious and want to find out more. Other than that one experience at the mall, I wouldn't say that I was discriminated against.

Another woman shared that she felt that her incident was a funny one based on a bank teller making assumptions about her.

> I was at the bank. I was standing in line, and then he said, 'Come on, please, next customer come up' or whatever. And then he said slowly, very slowly, he said, 'Where is

> your passport (paaasssport)?' And I was just shocked. For a minute, I just had to think about it. Why does he need my passport to check my bank account or to open my bank account?

She was genuinely confused and then realized that the bank teller thought she was a foreigner. She thought this was funny that he automatically assumed from her appearance, possibly her hijab, that she was not an American and would only have a passport as a form of identification. She went on to explain, "And then I said, 'Well, would my state ID work?' And he was in shock, 'Oh, yes, yes, your state ID would work!'"

> A third woman shared how a group of teens treated her in a shopping mall setting.
>
> I remember we went to a mall and I heard some teenagers. There is this group who was saying something for me. They think that I am wearing like this because of the winter. And they said, 'Hey stupid, it is hot in here!' But I just ignore them because I am not familiar to see a lot of people like this around.

She assumed that they were calling her stupid and telling her that it was hot because of the way she was dressed in long garments in the summer time. She chose to ignore them.

Women also disclosed that they felt discrimination had an impact on employability as well as in the employment environment itself. In job searching, the example was given that when employers see a name that appears Arab or Muslim on the application this impacts the woman's chances for hiring. "I am looking for a job; I feel there is some discrimination. When they see my name different, they feel that they don't want to hire someone that is not American."

On the job, an example was given of a coworker who was bothering a woman during her work. The coworker also mocked her publically while she was providing translation assistance to another Arabic speaker. She shared that in that work environment, she was the only foreign

female who was there. She went on to describe that there was one Hispanic male who spoke Spanish, that there used to be one Black lady who was either fired or left, and everyone else was White.

> One time I was translating at work for a person speaking Arabic… and she was outside the door. As soon as I stepped outside, she started making this really weird, 'blah blah blah'; I don't know how to say that…she did go like that so loud, and the person heard her. And I told her that was very rude and inappropriate. And the person felt like uncomfortable either. I didn't go to my boss because I know my boss will take her side.

The coworker was reported to a committee that handles discrimination, and the committee addressed the situation with her boss. The boss questioned the woman as to why she reported the situation to the committee. The woman was grateful that the situation was taken care of for her by the employer's anti-discrimination committee.

One woman in particular wearing niqab felt she was experiencing discrimination repeatedly during airport security screenings. She questioned herself as to whether the experience was indeed an act of discrimination. She stated that the first time she felt, maybe it could have been due to her misunderstanding of the process of screenings. Then she stated that in subsequent repeated experiences, she realized that no, this was not her, this was discrimination. About her second experience, she shared:

> They took me for an additional search, and it was very humiliating, and I asked them, 'Why did you do this?'
>
> 'Your zipper, I thought you were wearing a wire.'
>
> At that time, I was wearing a niqab as well. I didn't like it. That made me very sad. I didn't like how they treat me that way.

About her first experience, she shared:

> My hijab was very long and I have to lift it up to be able to take off my hijab and my belt. I don't feel comfortable if I uncover myself in front of everybody. And if I go through the device it will make a sound or siren. So, I took a side where no one can see me. People can see my back, but they can't see my front. I raised my clothes and I took my belt out. I removed my belt and I saw many people from the security staring at me and they were crowded there. When they saw it's my belt, they pretended like they are not looking. Maybe I was wrong… that behavior draws their attention and made them think bad of me. Second time for the zipper… I said, 'No, it wasn't myself, it was terrible.'

Experiences of discrimination in job searching, coworker relations, and traveling, have been touched on. Discrimination in the academic setting and in socializing in academic settings was discussed by two women in this study. "In some classes, I also noticed that usually students with niqab are neglected in group work. Even students try not to look at them or are a little bit afraid to communicate with them." Other students were excluding this woman during group course work, and interventions by faculty or the university were not noted.

> Some try to move themselves and or pretend that they didn't see me. I am not sure where the problem is…. not to be negative on them…maybe the problem is from me… maybe I am not able to communicate with them. That is the thing that I don't like.

Another woman recalls how she thought she was just going to come here and focus only on her studies. She realized throughout the course of her studies that being scrutinized, left out, and questioned because of her religious beliefs and practices had a greater impact than she expected. It was not until she started to have positive experiences that she realized just how much being excluded had impacted her.

> I remember the first time I was invited to somebody's home was in 2012. And I was very emotional and became tearful by just being invited to her place. Because I realized that, wow, I am very emotional now because I have been excluded actively or passively before. But this is the first time I was going into a White American non-Muslim home.

Being excluded was described in more ways than just not being invited to people's homes. This was also not being able to talk about religious beliefs openly and how those beliefs impact the work and quality of education received. How other students and professors would make comments that the place for religious beliefs and practices was not in higher education. This woman continued to explain, "It did not feel very safe." She did not feel safe in her academic setting and that impacted her motivation.

> I didn't even want to internally invest in that environment anymore. 'Let me just get my studies and leave.' And now that I am at the end of graduate school, I realize how important that sense of belonging is to success in graduate school. So, I do feel that impacted, that really impacted my motivation in grad school. I feel like, 'I don't even want to go to school. I don't want to go to that person and talk to them.'

She shared that although she felt that everyone struggles in school with writing and papers, that the sense of hostility she felt towards religion and the skepticism and sarcasm when it comes to God really affected her. "I feel like that sense of belonging really affects my motivation and investment."

She further explained that sharing her beliefs could lead to humiliation and embarrassment because in school there is this power that professors have. She had witnessed this with others who identified as Christian. "Others were humiliated in class. And I didn't want to be." She explained that a student could make the choice to say something and tick them off.

“Here I am this Muslim person, but I can't talk about my beliefs and how this is impacting me in my work.” It did not feel safe to talk about her beliefs because she would immediately be labeled as prejudice or discriminating. She explained that alternatively a student could make the choice to stay quiet and cater to what they want, and write this paper based on their views that are different than your true genuine views.

> Don't talk about religion…. don't bring that up… Talk about these other aspects of diversity and culture. So, I felt silenced in some ways. I felt like my experience… I could not voice myself. And this was a big part of who I was.

“There is pressure for people to conform to non-religious views. And that’s why people hide them.” This woman really felt like that negatively impacted her relationship with her professors.

> Right now, as I am applying for jobs and transitioning to the professional world, I realize I had been focusing on my personal growth and activism in terms of surviving in the system. My energy was being focused on that. Looking back, I feel like I was not focusing much on building professional connections. I feel like I lost having mentors to consult with. I feel like that was part of the impact of having to learn to navigate a system with discrimination in it.

Theme 4: Life in America is hard work

Overwhelmingly, women shared that life in America was hard work. This theme encompassed the experience of women who participated in this study. As mentioned in the prior sections, there were a variety of experiences and challenges that women faced in transitioning and adjusting to life and study here. Indeed, it is hard work to deal with missing family, friends,

and the lifestyle from back home... to break expectations of what one thought America was going to be like…and to face a plethora of challenges, including acts of intolerance and discrimination.

In this theme specifically, participants utilized the exact term or the mention of work or hard work in self-responses. This theme emerged at the point in time after they had passed the initial transition, and at a time when they were identifying their areas of adjustment. Women were not only adjusting to a new country, but they were also adjusting to academics and career. From their time spent adjusting, women identified and realized the increased amount of work and effort they were making in their life here.

Women reported that adopting a culture of hard work assisted them in being successful. "I definitely think that it shaped who I am and it definitely made me a strong woman." Women shared that when they worked hard and relied on themselves, others respected them for this. They saw themselves as having become stronger and more independent, experienced, educated, and career-oriented. They saw this as a function of the need to succeed in the U.S. For some, they saw this as a function of the need to convince their professors to provide them with continued funding and stay in the U.S.

> If you didn't make progress you will find many others who will make it better than you. In the beginning, you have to struggle to prove that you can do it. You have many weak points. You are a foreigner. You are a Muslim. And you are a woman. So, you have to jump over these three hard obstacles to say, 'Ok, people, you should forget about these three and I can do it.' So, to do that, you have to keep working, keep working, and focus.

For this woman, she wanted to do work here in the best way, respect the time of working, make progress, and convince them here that they needed her to stay. She hoped to find a good opportunity to stay here, and to be able to bring her family for long visits. She felt that this way

(by bringing family for extended visits), she would not lose anything and it would be good. Other women felt this way as well, that they needed to prove their abilities and their value by working hard.

For another woman who already had the opportunity to stay here, she felt that living in the U.S. had given her many chances but also that she needed to work hard.

> Coming to the U.S.A., miracles would not happen by themselves. The U.S.A. system and the culture and the respect gives you opportunities and pushes you, but it's you that needs to do the hard work. It's not the system that would give you everything for free. You give your part as a citizen and you find somebody that is willing to help you. So, I would say it's the land of opportunities if you are willing to do the hard work, if you're willing to contribute and participate.

For a woman who planned to stay living in the U.S. permanently, hard work meant that she needed to make an effort in multiple areas of her life. Her personal experience was that in order to adjust it took "not just time…. it took time with effort." She identified these areas of effort as working, housing, studying, learning the language, making friends, and making a community for yourself. She had met other women that came here and lived in the U.S. for over 10 years and did not accomplish much. "I didn't want to be like that. I put a plan for myself. I said I have 10 years, between these 10 years I want to do this, this, and this."

The same woman also identified that part of the hard work is trying to find a balance between just that – working hard and living life. She explained that going to work and going to school takes too much time from your family. She tried her best to spend time with her family. She disliked the lack of priority given to family life here.

> As far as my siblings go, I think they picked up a lot of American life that family is not really a priority. People here just work and go to school and they spend too much time away from home.

Her personal goal was to work hard and be successful but with the additional challenge of doing so in a way that would not neglect her own family. Another woman explained that finding this balance simply comes with time. "It is natural at the beginning it will be hard for them because of the differences with the system and the culture and for a lot of things. But with time, they will make balance."

Another woman explained that she realized the need to take responsibility "People are not gonna do your job. Not going to do you favors." She advised that a woman needs to, "be able to make decisions…be smart…work hard. And enjoy life." A different woman also felt that over time and with sustained hard work and effort, success and fulfillment will be reached. At first, she felt that she could not accomplish that much. Then over time she felt more encouraged when she saw other people's great projects in her field, her circle, and her community. Seeing their achievements "definitely made me want to do more and want to learn more… to be a successful person." As one of the women put it, "It's really easy. The only thing you need… to just work." The irony in this statement is that this woman meant that as long as you work hard, follow the instructions, dedicate the time, and pay attention to details, then things will become easy.

Succeeding Process

The third and final part of the story for this study that these women shared is their success process. They did not describe themselves as being successful; this is the researcher's interpretation based on their achievement, motivation, and thoughtful encouragement to others. This is the description of how they have changed to be successful. This is still an adjustment or a

change process, however, this part of the adjustment and change focuses on their successes. The strategies they used to thrive. Later a description will also be provided on what they recommend for others in order to be more successful in the future.

The succeeding process included three themes which emerged from in depth analysis of the categories of coping and support, changes to self and worldview, and changes to image of others. With time, women had developed a deeper understanding of the differences among the countries they had lived in and of the challenges they had experienced. They further developed an understanding of themselves, in terms of how they dealt with and coped with those differences or challenges in a useful way. Women would share a difficult or challenging experience and then say, "but then I started to get used to it" or "but then we adjusted after that." By this point in the adjustment process, women were aware of what aided or eased their adjustment. They knew how to articulate what worked best in dealing with past difficulties and challenges.

Theme 5: Home away from home

Recall that back home, religious practices and family functions were a primary source of social connection for women. Further, that friends were also neighbors. Women had shared that with their families they did everything together, including worship and leisure. With their friends back home, they would play sports like soccer, volleyball, and basketball. They would go for walks, go to the movies, go to the beach, swim, go shopping at a mall, eat together, go to Qur'an or Islamic study group, and spend time at one another's homes. Living in close proximity made it easy to engage in all these activities with one another. The challenge here was how to build that tight knit support network within a broader physical space and geographic area.

A strong theme that emerged from their stories about how to cope was this strategy of making a second home, a new home, or a home away from home. This particular strategy of building support networks warranted special attention. As discussed in earlier sections, practicing is part of the culture in a Muslim country. Women missed their families, their friends, their practices together, their holiday celebrations, and many other aspects of their culture...which was all part of their social support network. They developed a way to emulate, or build and reconstruct, some parts of that network here in their new home. One woman shared that she felt it was her second home. By this manner, women coped with that loss of family and community support by developing a home away from home.

Family

Women successfully coped with the loss of close and daily contact with family through the use of technology and social media. They used email, messaging, voice calling, and video calling. Specific applications and websites were mentioned including Skype, FaceTime, Facebook, Facebook messenger, Hotmail messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, and Tango.

> I think with the technology it helps a lot. The technology we have. It's not like we need to write letters. Now, it's like we almost talk with each other, speak or talk every two days, and of course chat every two hours.

Several other women went on to share just how extensively they used this technology.

> It might sound stupid, but Facebook helped me a lot. Because you feel that you are with your family, because you see them every day, you see them every time, and talk to them every day. So, it kind of helped.

Every day I spend three hours with them. Most of the time I have to check my cell phone. If I did not, they will be worried. If any one of them did not talk to me, I will be worried. Even they send pictures, everything; they are very connected to me.

I used to speak with my family like every day. My mother, like more than five times per day. I think by that way, they will never miss me! I keep bothering them all the day!

We talk all the time on Skype. You know, like, you have a lot of things…media you can use… WhatsApp, and Viber, and Skype…so you can keep that with them all the time.

As they described, some women would try to make some of their day, every day, as though they were living with their family members even though they were far away. Women could turn on their technology of choice and go about their day in their home with their family members online in the background. One of the women exclaimed how fortunate she and her sibling were that her parents paid so much extra attention to them while they were far from home. Her siblings jokingly said that it was like there was no one else in their family except her and her brother. They said, "Just one day not to call you it will be a disaster in this house. She (mother) will be worried, she will not sleep. But us, no one cares about us!"

Women learned to be more expressive with their emotions while away from home and communicating with family through the use of technology. "I appreciated them so much. I became more expressive to say how much I missed them and loved them, for the first time probably." Women felt that they may have become more expressive because they had left home. Back home, they were not very expressive. They would tell their families, "I love you, I miss you." They would write emails about how much they appreciated the things their families did.

Women also felt they made the best use of their time when they were able to visit family in person. One woman explained that she would feel like a princess when she visited back home

because everyone missed her and wanted to see her. A different woman shared that because her family missed her so much they would go out of the way to make special arrangements and throw surprise parties when she arrived for visits. Also, that she would be sure to bring gifts with her each time she visited. Several women added that they even felt they had become closer with their immediate as well as extended families because of the change and because of the distance. They made efforts to connect using technology, were more expressive emotionally, and spent more quality time together when they did visit.

Community

In working to rebuild their social network here in the U.S., women became strategic. They made conscious choices about which social outings to go to. They pondered over and carefully planned how to go about finding individuals to develop friendships with. They sought out Muslims for support and they learned to navigate their relationships with others. "I started to develop social circles… and I interacted in ways that I would kind of dictate."

Women described this development of social circles with other Muslims as almost a protective factor. They stated that having other Muslim colleagues, coworkers, peers, and professors was a big help. They also stated that although having close friends was helpful, having a big circle of Arab friends was especially helpful because the culture difference was not as much.

> I had more friends and it was really great…. because everyone around me almost was Muslim. Even in my department, all my friends were Muslim. Maybe from Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi, Syrian, Egyptian. Yeah, so, I felt almost like home. It was really great.

Women explained that having a circle of friends, colleagues, and professors of the same culture helped in so many ways. One example was having friends that pray with you at work.

Another example was having a Muslim advisor that helped you. In this example, the student explained that having a Muslim adviser helped because she did not have to explain certain things to them such as taking off work on holidays or eating halal. Another example was being able to speak the same language.

One woman shared in depth and explained why it was mostly Muslim friends who she reached out for.

> The reason is they understand where I come from, we share the same position, we have the same way, similar way, or living situation. So that's who I reach out for.
>
> Honestly, I think having good friends helped a lot. That was very helpful.
>
> Having Muslim friends. I think having friends is good, but having Muslim friends specifically is more helpful.
>
> Because we share the same beliefs. If I want a piece of advice, if I want to do something but I want to follow it in the Islamic way, it is helpful to speak to someone who is Muslim like me. Because they understand better. We have the same beliefs. And I just feel the connection better. Maybe because we use the same terminology, because we speak the same language. It's easier to talk when you speak the same language. You know what I mean?
>
> I think having Muslim friends with me through all of college helped me a lot to become… I won't say a better Muslim, but a stronger Muslim. And then it helped me a lot to have my friend that I met my first year of college because she was hijabi. And through her, I met so many other students. And I had a big group of students in college who were all Muslim, so it was good too.
>
> Alhamdulillah, Alhamdulillah, I was blessed with good friends.

Women made a conscious effort to find friends to socialize with that were Muslim and further to find places to go that would not contradict with their religious practices and beliefs. This included gatherings in which there would not be alcohol. Part of dealing with the drinking culture in the U.S. for some women was separating classmates and colleagues from social mates. One woman explained that she became more comfortable to verbalize and ask in professional settings if it was possible to go places that were not just bars. She explained that, at times, they would cater to that. Although she desired to have an integrated social life, she realized that she was only comfortable to engage in certain activities with certain people.

> First I felt like, uh, I wanted to have that social life of connecting with everyone. But I realized there was that segregation of my social activities. I feel I developed a different place where I feel comfortable interacting with people and creating my own social circles and inviting people to my social circles.

She went on to further explain how she accepted this and successfully learned to adjust.

> I think part of coping with it was really grounding myself in communities that were positive, that were able to integrate the different parts of who they were. 'Yeah, I'm American and I lived this life, but I'm also Muslim and this is how I integrate it.'

Women did indeed seek out individuals from their own language, cultural, and/or religious groups, however, they also sought out individuals from diverse language, cultural, and/or religious groups. Women looked to meet other international students in their courses and to increase their exposure to new cultures. They also specifically sought out individuals who spoke the dominant language and were part of the mainstream culture and religious group. "I made a mistake that I surrounded myself with only Arab friends. That effected the communication and improving in language."

Women expressed the importance of finding a balance by maintaining contact with a wide variety of people because of the diversity in the U.S. and the need to be exposed to many differences. “It was that important to me to make balance, to have American friends to have balance.” Another woman emphasized, “A lot of American friends, they are friendly, they like to help out, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim.” “Alhamdulillah I met good Muslim friends who were supportive, and non-Muslim as well.” A third woman shared that she had a classmate that was Orthodox Jewish and she found much support with her. “We would both pray at the same time, to our different things.”

One woman also shared that she had support from a professor who was Christian and she was able to process and talk with her professor about some things. Her professor brought in people to speak about how they were as professionals being from different religious practices and how they integrated it in their professional life. The speakers were Muslim, Jewish, Christian, agnostic, and Buddhist. The experience was really supportive for her and helped her to be true to herself.

Activities

Women became engaged in a variety of activities, some of which were similar to back home and some of which were new. They continued to engage in social activities surrounding religious worship and practices including prayers, attending mosque activities, and attending Sunday school (Islamic education). “The mosque is not just a place for worship, but it was also a place for community activities.”

One woman described that she made a conscious effort to attend at least one weekly religious activity, one volunteering activity, and one sports activity. For religious activities, it could be a Friday prayer, religious talk, book club, rallies, volunteering, or something that was

connected to her faith. She most preferred to attend Friday prayers when she could. “I was closed up and that really opened me up. It was kind of a safe place to go back and recharge, to go back into the world and be myself. That was one thing that really helped.”

Women also spent time with friends, family (for those who had some family members in the U.S.), and children engaged in leisurely activities. They spent their time together going out to dinner, a coffee shop, shopping, the movies, a spa, the beach, bowling, haunted houses, forests, walks, parks, traveling, sports, exercising, arts and crafts, volunteering, and youth groups. Some of the sports and exercise mentioned were yoga, cycling and biking, gymnastics, soccer, basketball, and rollerblading. As noted, women were engaged in a wide variety of activities outside the home.

Women also developed new habits and hobbies at home. In addition to spending time using technology talking to family and friends overseas, they liked to also read and relax at home. Watching programs and shows online, specifically watching YouTube was also mentioned. One of the women also picked up the habit of crocheting while watching movies at home. She felt this helped with stress when she was in school.

As described, women became strategic in order to successfully cope with the loss of family and friends, develop their social support network, and select religious and culturally appropriate social activities. Women shared they felt that they were not alone here because of all these success strategies. Also, because others gave them the feeling that they were their family here. They found others that were kind, helpful, and supportive.

Theme 6: Inner strength and independence

In this theme women discussed how they developed inner strength and independence. Women saw the development of these qualities as an important step to successful adjustment to

life and study in the U.S. The different ways women developed their inner strength and independence were through faith, advocacy, and skills. Women turned to their faith in times of hardship and challenge. They maintained and sometimes increased their religious practices. Women acquired new skill sets and they learned to speak up for themselves.

Faith-based perspective

Women developed an understanding of challenges in their life. This understanding stemmed from their faith. They looked at challenges as coming from Allah. "Allah is challenging me and wants to see my reaction." They perceived challenges because of being a Muslim as a positive aspect of their personal development. They believed these challenges would encourage them to persevere and strengthen their faith. "And even if something happened to me because of my religion, I am happy because it's a challenge."

Another woman explains how, in Islam, one's understanding of hardship and challenge is important.

> And I also believe in something in the Islam religion that is from the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him. God tells us the meaning. That's the translation: if you think in positive terms or results, you will get a positive result. If you think in negative outcomes or results, you will get that. So, we should think of Allah, of God, that He will give us a good life in the future. He will do the best for us most of the time or all the time.

The understanding is that although one may experience hardship and challenges, there should still be a belief that good will come. A belief that Allah is doing what is best for her. All will come in the future.

The same woman further discussed her Islamic perspective on positivity. She shared that one should look at the positive aspects and focus only on the positive side in everything. This

strategy was seen as especially useful during hardships, and she felt this is what helped her. “In every obstacle, every wrong that I face, there is something good that will come out of it.” She explained that she learned to focus on goals and solutions rather than negatives.

Positive encouragement from parents was also helpful and for some their parents, even though far away, were their main supporters. One woman shared that her mom would say to her, “This is your future and this is your life and you wish to find a better life, so you should follow that. And I will be here, and we can visit. Everything will be okay.” The focus was on positivity. She further shared that her mother told her, “You are good, but you have to believe that you can do it. You can’t think that I or anyone can help you without asking for help.” Both positive encouragement and advice was given to this woman by her parent. The positive encouragement to believe in yourself and that everything would be okay, and the advice to speak up and tell others when you need help. A different woman explained that she felt it was a combination of how strong you are, patient and hardworking, as well as your spouse or family being willing to help. “We cannot say, ‘Oh, you can fight world by yourself. It’s difficult.”

Another woman shared that her siblings would always remind her of her goals. They would say to her, “You have a goal in your life; you came here to be a professor.” They continued to encourage her, “So, you need to go and finish your assignment and come back. And it’s just a matter of time.” They would even try to make her feel better by saying that there was not much to do back home anyway, and that she would eventually get bored there. She was reminded that her current situation or hardship is temporary. “It’s just a matter of time and everything will be good.”

Religious practices

Women described their religious practices as central to developing inner strength and independence. Women shared specific faith practices they used to strengthen themselves. These were both individual and group worship practices. They including Qur'an reading, recitation, and memorization, prayer and *dua* (supplication), and charity and volunteering. Their practices were a way of coping and of developing. "Sometimes I cope by going to *halaqa* once in a while. I go to *Jummah* prayer once in a while. We do pray and listen to the imam and go to lectures on *anbiya* and stuff like that." *Halaqa* is the Arabic term that refers to a religious gathering or speech. *Anbiya* is the Arabic word for prophets.

Women's families encouraged them to turn to these practices and to turn to Allah to be successful. "You need to watch God there. You need to work on your prayer. Memorize, read Qur'an. Because when you become close to Allah, Allah will help you and support you." This woman explained just how important this concept was to her.

> I have strong belief in this. In this life here you are far away from the family, you become in a difficult situation, and no one will help you except Allah. And you just have an honest belief in Allah and pray to him and He will find the solution and find something valuable to you.

God and the people they loved were described as their support. Another woman explains that it took time to adjust and to develop this. In the beginning, she felt that she started losing her culture and her beliefs to try to fit in. But not her belief in God. She felt that God is the only one truly with you.

> He is the only one that with me (God). At the beginning of two years, I didn't speak any English. And the people around me spoke only English. And the only person that

> spoke my language, I didn't get along with. He (God) was my best friend; He was my only friend at that time.

Yet another woman expressed the importance to her of prayer and *dua* . "I want to say make a lot of prayer and dua, because that brings a lot of power." She shared that there are things that she prayed for years ago and is receiving now.

Charity and volunteer work were described as not only a focal point of the faith, but also as a way to provide one with a sense of peace and stability. One woman gave a strong recommendation to get involved in charity work to develop oneself.

> You are in this community. And I feel a part of our responsibility with our faith is to be faithful wherever we are. So, try to go and serve. Don't just take, give. And part of giving to the community is part of our belief system. When you give charity you don't actually lose anything, you gain. So just that contribution at the community level is very important. It's not about giving others or getting from others, but it's really for your sense of peace and stability.

Belief in Allah, as well as having developed one's social support system, were seen as the best combination. "Always believe in Allah. Once you believe in Allah, Allah guides you. Also, you need people or a country that believes in you."

Skills

Women learned new skill sets that helped to develop their inner strength and independence. These women were here to study and to increase their scholarly and academic knowledge. They were gaining new experiences and developing new skills in their professions. These experiences and skills were helping them to feel more competent. Women shared that they saw themselves now as more independent, experienced, educated, and career oriented.

A woman described in detail the skills she acquired in her transition and adjustment to life and study here. She shared that she learned to familiarize herself with the resources and education available. She asked around from friends how to find programs, such as daycare and benefits for low-income people. She found assistance through the supplemental nutrition program funded by federal grants called Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). She taught her child English at home until the child went to daycare. She prepared herself for both the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) by using books from the library, using the Internet, and using some CD's. She looked for scholarships and went to the university to meet professors. She volunteered her time to learn and practice in her field of study. These practices and skills helped her to feel stronger and more independent.

Another woman described how she tried to feel independent. She wanted to become familiar with her city and know how to get around on her own.

> I just wanted to learn as much as I can by myself and just be independent. That's my main concern. I want to do everything I could by myself. Groceries, go around, take my child to the hospital myself. I wanted to feel independent. Growing up, I felt always that we all as a family depend on our dad because we couldn't drive. So, the first thing I wanted to have is freedom. Coming to the USA in this huge country, continent. Not depending on anybody.

This woman felt that over time she became more responsible with money, food, and a lot of things. She shared that she learned to cook and be more independent. She described that she became more aware of herself and who she was and what was going on around her.

A different woman described an incident where her check was rejected for rent because she signed her name in the wrong location. She explained that back home, it would be ok to

make a mistake like this. She learned that the regulations and system life is different here, so to expect that she might make a lot of mistakes "It was difficult for me. But it was good for me to learn to that I should handle responsibility myself." She learned that "here you need to read everything; you will be responsible for everything." Though she had not expected something like that would happen, she felt that it made her stronger and more confident. "Now I feel that I became familiar with the major rules and regulations, with the way of living, I became more confident. I can handle myself." She summarized, "I can do anything by myself. That is the major thing that I find it amazing or good that I learned about."

Advocacy

Women became advocates for themselves. Some women worked hard to overcome their feelings of shyness. This occurred as they developed increasing self-confidence. They shared that as they became more confident, they were more comfortable to speak up. "For myself, I am not very social, but I am kind of shy, but when I went to college and I tried to be more open and to have courage to know new people and to do new things." Women learned to speak with others about their needs, their skills, and their faith. The same women shared further how her experience changed her.

> I would say it made me more strong and patient. It made me hope always for the better, no matter what happens keep a good spirit and not lose hope. Yeah, it definitely made me stronger. Because living alone is not that easy. Living away from your family is not that easy.

Another woman shared how her personality changed and she became more outgoing. She felt she became more social with male and female classmates and colleagues.

> I am more social than when I first moved here. And I think it has to do with my field of study. I really had to not be shy in the beginning. I had to change that because things were not really working out.

She really felt that she had to learn to be more aggressive and fight to accomplish things.

> Here the schools are mixed. At first I was so shy, I was only used to being around girls. I was a very shy person back home, didn't talk much; I would rather be at home. After I moved here, the first couple years, I realized I cannot be shy; I cannot be quiet. And I had to change.

Yet another woman shared that her experience here made a big change to everything, including her self-confidence. She was very shy at first and used to look at the ground when walking and when talking to her professor. She even exclaimed that at the beginning her professor thought she was actually looking for something on the floor. She realized she had to change, and to simultaneously change others views about her.

Women voiced their need and their desire to change negative perceptions of Muslim women. A fourth woman shared that she convinced herself that she had to change her shyness and change the perception others have of Muslim women. She explained that Muslim women are sometimes criticized for being modest and also criticized for coming to the U.S. to study.

> Just try to feel that you are here. You exist. So, you have to deal with people. And if you can see yourself, others can see you. You can't hide all the time. Americans here, they have a background that Muslim people, especially Muslim women, their mind can't work. They don't know how to talk. They can't talk in front of others. They are afraid all the time. They need someone to, you know, protect them. They can't move without a husband or a brother. You know, this stuff. You have to convince them that, no, we can

> change. We can change our self to the country we are living in, without breaking anything in our religion. Because our religion didn't say that you have to hide. No! You want to study, so you can go to study and you can talk to people. And you know, Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) said when you are studying it's as if you are doing the best thing in Islam. So, this is good. Everyone supports you. So now it's your turn, so support yourself.

This woman emphatically highlights that Muslim women are not doing anything wrong by coming to the U.S. to study. And in fact, that in Islam, studying is one of the best things one can do.

A fifth woman shared that she became involved with the Muslim Student Association to develop the strength to speak up to others about her faith. She surrounded herself with people who were born and raised in the US and were confident with who they were. They were able to express their culture and their faith, and that gave her a sense of confidence too.

> I was involved in Islam awareness projects where we were able to sit in nonthreatening and non-hostile environments. Provide food, draw henna on people's heads, and talk just openly about, you know, 'What you know about Islam?' 'Would you like to?' 'Do you have a few minutes to talk about it?' So that really was a healthy way of dealing with it."

Women shared that they really learned to speak up and advocate for themselves. Some women did not realize they could go talk to professors for help. They did not know that they could explain their situations and advocate for themselves, or even ask for extensions. Learning to speak about their skills was new for them. "I was like, 'How am I going to do this?' It was very new and a little bit painful to be in those positions." This woman explained that she was not accustomed to embellishing. It was cultural to be modest and it was not seen as a positive thing

to boast about oneself. “If I did one thing I am going to talk about spearheading this project and I don’t know…not lying…but that was something so different!” Here she was told not to be modest and she realized this when writing cover letters, that being modest would not get her far. “So I learned how to embellish!”

Women recognized and verbalized their need to develop both inner strength and independence in order to be successful. They used a variety of practices to develop these. Women shared that success in the face of challenge was attributed to the practice of turning to Allah. In order to be successful, women shared that they practiced their faith, learned new academic and personal skills, and became advocates for themselves. They described themselves as becoming stronger, patient, more self-aware, and more independent. Developing this inner strength and independence helped them to become successful towards reaching their goals here in the U.S.

Theme 7: Respect and understanding

Women described their development of respect and understanding towards others. This developed after they had some experience living in the U.S. In an earlier theme in this chapter, women shared how the reality they experienced upon their initial arrival was different than what they had expected. This was especially true when compared to depictions they had seen in media or film. In this theme, women were no longer dealing with the initial transition and adjustment processes. This theme reflected the change over time in their way of thinking. These changes occurred in their views on discrimination, on America and Americans, on people back home, and on themselves. These changes influenced their thinking by increasing their understanding of themselves and others. Thinking in terms of respect and understanding was a strategy used by women to be successful in life and study here in the U.S.

Discrimination

Several women shared experiences of being harassed, insulted, and questioned. A summary of discrimination experiences can be found in an earlier section in this chapter on challenges. Some women expressed that they did not want to assume or say that others were acting or speaking badly to them because they were Muslim, Arab, or wearing hijab. "You would have some incidents from now and then, it happens. It's people's nature; it's not because of you. People would discriminate against fat, skinny, tall, short…it's not always because if you are a Muslim or not."

What was consistent throughout women's stories was the way they conceptualized people. Their strategy was to look beyond the hurtful words. They sought to understand the reasoning behind what may be leading others to act or speak in ways that were perceived as negative. Further, that one should not expect to be treated negatively nor judge others prior to interacting with them.

> I feel so many Muslims, and some of them who were born here and grown up here, they are still sensitive about being a Muslim. I know everybody experiences it, but sometimes you don't think, you just go out there. It was completely 180 degrees opposite. Because people scare you, the radio, the TV, and you put pressure on yourself. Especially in situations where there are more people. Conferences and such, you feel at least one person is going to attack me, but it's actually the opposite, people respect me. And people are coming and approaching me, because some people, *Subhan Allah,* they have the curiosity to know more. And if they ask you, it doesn't mean they want to harass you. They ask you sometimes because they are curious. They want to know more. Just they are curious and want to know.

Recall that *Subhan Allah* is a common prayer of praise and the meaning is glory to Allah.

This woman felt some of the reasoning for being questioned may be because others are curious about her and want to know more about Islam, Muslims, Arabs, and/or hijab. She also looked to herself in different situations to see if she had done anything wrong. She used another example of driving. She exclaimed that maybe they might be honking at you because you are a bad driver or you did something wrong. Or that maybe a job did not work out because there was a better candidate. Or that there was a possibility that an individual might be saying things because they dislike all religions, not only because one is Muslim.

When it came to discrimination and hate crimes, women shared that it was important to them not to jump to the step of anger that this is what everyone is like. The reaction to the Chapel Hill shooting was given by one woman. In her mind, there was no doubt that it was a hate crime, however, she felt it was also necessary to look at how it developed.

> Things have been generalized towards me and my community being Muslim or Arab. There is no question for me to look at it as being a hate crime and how did this develop to this point. But also not jumping to that step of anger, 'Yeah, everybody is like this.' Circumstances led him to do this act. I try to think about it that way with people. 'Okay, that was very ignorant, there is a lot of hate behind that.' I think I am more understanding and try to hold myself more accountable in terms of not generalizing. I try to see people as individuals and not generalize negative experiences onto everyone over here. I try, but it's still a process.

Another woman felt it was necessary to recognize that while there was discrimination, there were also laws and rights to protect people.

> So, a lot of woman would hear all these stories from their families. 'You need to take the hijab off; they gonna hit you and they gonna oppress you.' Yes, you would find some people who would be mean to you, but at the same time you have some laws to protect your rights. Yes, people would be mean to you, but it's better than most of the Arab countries. There are actually human rights here. Maybe they got violated, but if you got caught you in big trouble. This is the only difference.

Some women acknowledged having experienced discrimination themselves. Other women acknowledged that there was discrimination in the U.S., even if they did not feel they experienced it personally. The women in this study did not deny that discrimination occurred; however, they shared that the way they made sense of this was to develop an understanding that we are all humans. "I was starting to appreciate that everyone is human."

Women felt that although wrongful actions need to change, they preferred to maintain a level of tolerance and to seek a level of understanding. "I realized how human I am and how human other people are around me. So that kind of made me feel more humble and understanding. But also more responsible." This woman felt more responsible to understand how ignorance can have a negative impact on others.

> I think I am becoming more understanding towards people. I mean… I hate it… I hate when there is prejudice or discrimination going on, or when I am a part of it, but I think I am more understanding of where it comes from.

She felt more understanding of other people's mindsets, points of view, and of where discrimination comes from.

America and Americans

Women shared that their views became more respectful and understanding of America and Americans. One woman described her journey to understanding in detail. She described that she became a more liberal and tolerant person who had more exposure to different cultures.

> All the people I knew back home were the same as me. Same hair color; same skin color; same traditions; same everything. Here there are so many from around the globe. And you see the difference, you understand, you become more sensitive.

She recognized that everyone in the world wants the same things like to be happy, have a better life, see their kids happy, and want their kids to succeed. She felt that people share similar traits like jealousy, greed, selfishness, and compassion. Also, that there are differences, and that "the media and stereotypes focus on those differences and don't focus on what's common between us."

The media was seen as biased. The same woman as above believed it would help if the media was fairer and focused on the majority, or the 99% of the 2 billion Muslims in the world that just want to be happy, raise their kids, and be good citizens and not the 1% who are doing bad stuff. "If you see a hijabi woman walking in the street, you shouldn't be thinking about the 1% that you see in the media." She believed it would help make hijabi women feel more comfortable if the media focused on things we have in common, rather than the things that separate us.

This woman developed an understanding that media bias impacted Americans and their views of Muslims. She wanted Americans to develop the understanding that not every Muslim is like what they see in the media. She felt the media only shows the one percent that is bad. She felt it is better to see things in common, and that the media does not show this.

As mentioned earlier, this woman herself had developed a fairly negative image of America from the media. Prior to spending time here and getting to know the people here, all she knew was from the media.

> So, the only thing I knew about America before was wars. It started wars in the world and killed people…This is all what I knew. Now, I follow more of American politics, and I know the story is a little bit different. Sometimes, I am more understanding…I still don't agree about certain things, but I know, I see the other side of the story. That there are a lot of good people. That people, especially the citizen that is working on the street that doesn't know what's going on, he just has the same interest… He doesn't like killing; he doesn't like wars as much as I don't like it.

Over time, she realized that nobody likes war.

Another woman learned not to judge Americans by what their government does. She shared that she would keep telling people when she goes back home not to do this. Not to judge the American people by their government. She acknowledged that "yes, we feel on many issues that this is not fair for America to do this or this is not good…they shouldn't do this," but people are different than the government. She felt the American people also do not like many things their government does.

> You don't have to, for example, to hate America or to hate Americans because of something related to politics. It's completely different. They are innocent people. They are, you know, so friendly, so kind. They have feelings. And they hate what's going on in the other countries all over the world. Sometimes they can't change the politics as we can't change our politics too. So don't judge them, all of the Americans, because of something that the government did. It's completely different.

Women shared they learned that there is a difference between America and Americans. that one should not blame Americans for what America does or does not do. Just as one should not blame Syrians for what Syria does or does not do, or Egyptians for what Egypt does or does not do, or Saudi Arabians for what Saudi Arabia does or does not do. "So, all of us in the same side. I mean, all of us, regular people, innocent people who think most of the time the same way."

Women shared that over time they found good people here and they had not expected that from what they had heard or seen prior to coming. "There are smart people here. There are intelligent people here. There are people who have belief in faith, who practice their faith." This woman went on to explain.

> Not everyone is an idiot or evil or selfish person thinking about war or money and fame. There are some good people here, American people here. Smart people who work hard. I have educated mentors in college. I have good friends. I have good neighbors. Of course, there is bad and good everywhere in the world, but I didn't expect Americans to be like this. I had a different opinion of them. Like I said, not everybody is George Bush. If you don't live here and kind of like connect with them, you will have a different opinion about Americans. But now, I am friends with Americans. I have class with them.

Another woman explained how she developed a better perception of America and Americans after living here.

> When I came here I learned that we shouldn't laugh at people or we shouldn't perceive them as criminals or something. When I dealt with them I felt I should have a balanced life or perception. Because even here beside me this is Jewish, here is Christian… not just like on the TV or Israel or this stuff. So, I don't care for what I see in the TV and I

> disconnected myself from media and the news. I am here treating you or him or her as person.

Her understanding helped her to treat others as individuals, rather than by what she had seen or heard in the media. She also developed a better understanding of men.

> In my country, I wasn't familiar dealing with men because we're disconnected. At the beginning, it was difficult for me to be in that situation. But after that, I learned that I just treat them as people, as a person. It doesn't matter their religion, their gender, their nationalities.

Women developed a better image of America and more respect for Americans after living here. "It definitely improved the image of Americans." This woman had worked with community programs and was exposed to people who live in poverty and from low socioeconomic status. Her experience from her job and working with the American people made her image improve. "It definitely made me understand the system and the culture more and have more respect for people." Another woman shared,

> So when you are there, you think that all Americans…that Americans don't know anything about us and they don't like us maybe. But when I came here, I know that there are some people that really understand our culture and they respect it.

Yet another woman shared,

> This is what makes America America; that you can still be from a different country and live here. I mean, there is no two typical people. So you can be whatever color, religion, race, and you still can live here.

People back home

Women shared that just as they developed a deeper understanding of America and Americans, they also developed greater understanding of people from back home. Mostly, women noticed shortcomings. They noticed these shortcoming with people from back home who were still living in their home countries, as well as with people from back home who had also come, like them, to live or study in the U.S. In a later section on views of self, the shortcomings they noticed within themselves will be highlighted more in detail along with how they changed those.

One woman described her concern for women and men from back home who would change when coming to the U.S. by giving up their faith practices. "Some concepts in their mind it changed in the wrong way. Because they understand freedom in the wrong way." She saw that women would dress less modestly.

> For example, for women or girls, they just try to change how they look because they think that it's more freedom. They misunderstand the freedom. They give up the religion, the look, just to change to say it's free.

She saw that men would seek more relationships outside of marriage.

> For men, for guys, they try to know more women or more girls. They try to prove we are free. But actually, they do the reverse. I see this with guys already married. Doesn't matter if adult or mature.

A different woman expressed an alternative view on freedom here. She shared how the freedom here allowed her personally to do more charity and community service. She expressed that instead of giving money from a distance, she felt more connected and engaged here in charity work. This was because back home there were some limitations on women, and she

would have to wait for someone to take her. Living here made a different woman realize that back home "people tend to judge quickly, not based on facts but based on media and stereotypes." She felt that having lived elsewhere had really given her an eye-opener.

Another woman explained how she realized that people back home judge others based on class, status, and/or tribe. "Tribalism is more over there. Racism here." She meant that while people in the U.S. discriminate based on race, people back home discriminated based on tribe. "I was angry about discrimination over there when it came to socioeconomic status, tribal status. But I feel like I am more informed going back." She felt that with her new understanding she was more aware of challenging things like class and status. "When I go over there for vacations, I challenge their views with discrimination."

Woman also expressed that the work ethic was different for some people back home. She felt sometimes that back home "People are more authoritative or have a superior position to you. Sometimes you feel that they don't really care about you succeeding, all they want is for you to do the job." A different woman explained that, "In my country, work is useless. You can keep working, keep working, and in the end you will prove nothing." A third woman explained that the culture in the work environment needed improvement back home. She gave an example of one way to do this.

> Like when some workers who speak in Arabic are not clear in Arabic, you will find some of us laughing or making jokes. This is very harmful. I am thankful to God that I learned this thing, and even I go back and teach my sisters never laugh at anyone. They are humans being like us.

The same woman noticed the lack of disability services back home and good availability of services in the U.S. "For the disabled people, they have a good life here. Usually for the thing

that I don't have it in my country and I have it here." She wished to see an improvement with more availability of services back home. She wished to see them have access to buses and buildings, and environments that were prepared to equip them. She shared that this "made me sometimes cry for some places in my country that are not equipped for those people."

With their new understandings, women saw that there was a lot to change in their countries back home. The way of teaching was noted. Back home, women shared that students just sit while the professor does everything. This was something women said they were working on changing back home. The change would be closer to the method of teaching in the U.S. where "they teach us… as adults…they allow us to depend on our self in reading, and making discussion, and participating."

Women shared their political views about people and their experience back home. "There is no democracy, no freedom of speech, no freedom at all. Leaders who don't step down when people don't want them to be leaders anymore." Another woman shared her views in depth.

> All other Arabs, we do not like Israel and we think Israel is the enemy. And we also did not like the regime in Syria (prior to the war/revolution). Since the revolution has started, we are routing for the revolution.

Her concern was deep for the people back home. "We have to get rid of the corruption. It's a huge corruption there."

This same woman hoped to see a change. Her hope was that the welfare of the people would not be left behind. She wanted the amount of technology and advancement seen here in the U.S. to also reach people there in her home country. "Ok, let's say take one example of the Internet. People are now barely having the Internet…And here you have very fast Internet. This is a difference." She explained how back home things are very expensive, like the phone rate and

phone taxes for example. She shared that there is no competition in anything as almost everything belongs to the president's family. She felt that is a dictatorship. "That is the major major difference. Here, you have some kind of democracy. There it is no democracy, all dictatorship."

> This woman's hope was that the people in her country would also change.
>
> In our countries we have a lot a lot to do, and we need to change in ourselves, in our government. We need to be more loyal to our countries. Because now it seems that everyone there is looking for their own interest and no one cares about the country. That's the basic reason why we are like that now.

She felt that,

> It starts with one…everyone should start from their self; they have to eliminate the corruption in their self to deal with the corruption in the country. And we have to have more openness in talking to each other and understanding differences.

Self

Overall, women became much more aware of their own views and this lead to increased respect and understanding. "I learned to respect other nationalities more than I used to." Women felt they developed this increased sense of respect, acceptance, and understanding over time. "The first thing I learned is to respect. Respect. You want people to respect you, then you have to respect them." All these changes and new insights occurred in the context of their adjustment to living and studying here in the U.S.

> The way I think now is a little bit different than the way I used to think. I believe that all of these experiences have changed my way of thinking a little bit and it taught me to be more accepting of others.

Women were making efforts to be better and more successful in their life and in their studies here. They shared that these changes in their understanding helped them to improve. “I think it improved my ability to make meaningful relationships with others. And it also changed the way I view other people, or other cultures and religions. It made me more accepting.” Another woman shared, “I learned to deal with different people from different backgrounds and culture. I like that.” The changes that these women saw occur in themselves were seen as beneficial. “I have a better understanding of people, better communication skills. Overall better personal skills…. communication wise, social wise… better. In different ways, it’s better.”

A woman explained how understanding others also helped her to interact more openly with others.

> People are different. You used to have a certain point of view, ‘this is the right, this is the wrong.’ But then you start opening more. ‘Ok, maybe the way we do it as a culture…as a culture, not religion… it’s not always right. Whatever they are doing is good.’ So you start opening more.

Thinking that one is right all the time was seen as a negative and a closed point of view; however, being open to seeing that others can also do things in a good way was seen as positive. After living here, women learned to see different views and not to think their way or the way back home is the only way that is correct. “It opened my mind a lot.”

When it came to religion, one woman described her desire to change in judging others but not in her belief in Islam.

> I try not to be judgmental just because I believe Islam is the best religion and it’s my religion. I try my best to also understand others and the reasons why they practice their religion and why they choose to behave a certain way.

She explained that because she believes her religion is the best, she tries to be careful not to translate that into feeling superior to others.

> Just believing in your religion makes you feel a little bit superior to others and it makes you not accept other people. So I believe that a smart Muslim, or a smart Christian or whatever, takes their own religion and practices in a way that it does not make you feel superior to others.

She developed a sense of understanding on what religion means. “Religion is a very personal relationship between a person and God, and their God.”

Another woman deepened her understanding in religion that God had created us all differently.

> I learned not to hate people; I hate the behavior that what they do. And not to criticize them because they do something wrong, because all are human and we all subject to do something if we had the same circumstances or same situations. Because even this is what God created us.

From this understanding, she developed greater respect for differences. “I learned to listen to the other people, and to respect and value their opinion even if it’s different than mine. Because as I have experiences, they have experiences.” Another woman felt that “learning Islam within the American culture was important for me.” For her, learning Islam and how to speak about Islam was facilitated by being in a culture that was different than her own and by having new experiences.

The same woman described her understanding as a process. She felt she was still working on learning how to engage in a communal sense with people who were different from her. “It’s an ongoing process. I feel a part of it was learning and putting myself through situations that I

know I would be somewhat uncomfortable." She actively put herself in more situations with people who were different from her so she had the opportunity to learn and grow.

At the beginning of her process, this woman felt she would be "saying stuff initially and realizing it was not taken well or respected or responded to… and then going through a silent phase and starting to speak again with a little bit of anger." She recognized she felt angry and would respond out of anger. "But it was more anger, and I feel like now it is settling into a place more of acceptance and comfort…not feeling like there is a threat, like finding my place." Eventually over time, she felt acceptance. Even further with time, she no longer felt like she had to change for others or that others had to change for her. She described it as "not feeling like I have to cater for them or they have to cater for me." She reached a point in her development where she felt open to differences.

Women developed respect and understanding for others. They learned "not to say people in my country doing this, or these people are like this, or those people are like this." This woman explained, "I feel that I became more mature to give those people respect and treat them in a good way. Women realized that people can have the same emotions and needs while simultaneously having different languages, traditions, customs, and values. "But all of them…you will find the greedy, the poor, the rich, the happy, the sad. The same natures, but the difference is the language and homeland they are staying in, the country where they are from." For all humans, this woman felt, "You will find someone kind and someone mean, in my opinion."

Overall, women shared and explained that their thinking and understanding changed over time. Their experience changed them. The prior theme discussed how they changed to develop their own inner strength and independence. In this theme, the changes occurred in respect and

personal understanding. This included an understanding of discrimination, America and Americans, people from their country back home, and their own self. They were trying to understand what was happening in the world around them. They developed these personal beliefs to makes sense of things and to successfully adjust to life and study in the U.S.

Recipe for Success

Women gave advice to other women who may be coming to the U.S. to live and study here for the first time. Their advice centered on academic, social, and spiritual success. They recommended that other women learn how to keep a balanced lifestyle. The advice they gave was not always the same as what they had done to achieve success. In the section titled, succeeding process, women shared how they coped and adjusted successfully by developing a home away from home, inner strength and independence, and respect and understanding. This included choosing to cope with discrimination through showing tolerance and developing an understanding of others.

The success advice given for newcomers was sometimes a repetition of what the women in this study actually did; however, it was more accurately advice on what they think is best to do. The success advice is what the women in this study would advise or recommend for future students coming to live and study in the U.S. for the first time. Now after having experienced what worked and what did not, in essence, they verbalized a recipe for success. These are their recommendations on how to best succeed during this transition and adjustment process. Their advice, based on their experiences, on how to help women like them to be successful.

Academic Advice

Women shared that English is the first key to success in the U.S. “Highly recommend working on the language, because it’s the first key.” They were told that “it is important. They should learn the language before they come.” They were encouraged to take English classes before coming. “At the beginning, when they come to the United States, they should have English background. Not only come to here with Arabic language.” One woman exclaimed, “Learn your English man!”

Although learning the English language was stated as the first key, the context in which the language was used, or the culture was also stated as important. Learning both the language and the culture were strongly advised before coming to the U.S. Women were advised to focus on strengthening English language skills as much as possible. "Because if you cannot communicate, your integration is going to be harder."

Women recommended best strategies when learning English. Surrounding oneself with others who were also learning English was seen as a comfort, support, or encouragement. “Part of my courage came from being with international students who had a very heavy accent and that gave me a sense of confidence and the courage to speak out.” They did, however, caution other women not to surround themselves only with people who speak Arabic. This was stated as a major detriment when trying to learn English.

Strengthening English abilities also strengthened relational abilities. “When you don’t have the barrier you feel more comfortable, you socialize here.” Women felt more able to communicate and express themselves with others when they felt their speaking skills had improved. “Now that I know more and I am educated and speak better English, I talk with my

friends who are non-Muslim about Muslims, Islam." This woman also developed the habit of studying in a group with others.

> I always made group study because I figured that was the way I learn. Throughout college I always had one or two students that I studied with, so that's how I survived. So that helped a lot with my English.

Women encouraged newcomers to use clarification when speaking. Asking for more communication from professors was recommended, especially when it comes to assignments. One woman explained how important asking for clarification was in order to understand what others are saying.

> One of most important things is to make sure you understand what the other person is asking or what they want from you. And I believe sometimes that caused some trouble for me because I was always embarrassed to ask for clarification. And that of course caused, you know, more trouble when you don't ask for clarification. So you think that you understand something, but you know that you can't understand and that's where miscommunication can happen.

In theme four titled, life in America is hard work, women shared how they worked hard and relied on themselves. They believed that others respected them for this and that hard work assisted them in being successful. This was another recommendation for academic success. "In the beginning, you have to struggle to prove that you can do it." They encouraged women to be strong and focus. "You have to keep working, keep working, and focus." They reminded women that nobody was going to do the work for them; that they must develop their independence. The women in this study wanted future students to know that success is achievable. They

recommended that newcomers should reach out to others for help, but that they also must do their part to succeed. “It’s you that needs to do the hard work.”

Social Advice

Women recommended that after learning English, after learning about the culture, and after moving here, newcomers should then focus on making friends and building a network. This network would include meeting new people as well as maintaining close ties with family and friends from back home. In theme five titled, home away from home, women shared how they successfully coped with the hardship of being away from home. They developed a home away from home. They maintained regular and frequent contact with family and some friends using technology and social media. Women even shared that they would spend hours per day keeping video calls open while going about their work or regular activities at home. They recommended trying to make some of the day, every day, as though living with family even while being far away.

When meeting new people, women recommended having a balance of Muslim and Arabic speaking peers or colleagues and others from different ethnic, linguistic, and spiritual backgrounds. Women were encouraged to connect to people. They were encouraged that even if they find people who are different from them, they can still be a source of support.

> Try to find support for you to be comfortable. You don't want to do it in a place that's not safe for you. It’s ok not to be comfortable at times. Try to connect to people, even if they are not Arab or Muslim, even people with the same religious practice, even if they are from other religions.

Most importantly, women were encouraged to find those individuals who would be understanding to them. The same woman as above continued to explain that even when staying in touch with people from back home, to try to do so with those who are supportive.

> Sometimes people will not understand the nature or the rigor of your life over here. Try to connect with people who are understanding to you, so that doesn't add pressure to you. Nobody is going to completely understand, but try to find those who are relatively understanding and empathic to where you are at in your life.

Having a guide and finding a mentor were recommended. A guide was defined as someone that can help you get situated. “Make sure that you have someone that can at least guide you, and offer you advice, and help you navigate the system in beginning.” A mentor was defined as someone in your specific field. Women were encouraged to find others that could guide them better in the communities that they were in. “It would be helpful if they have a friend or a family that they know, walk them through.”

As mentioned in the section on challenges earlier in this chapter, women recommended learning the transportation system and purchasing a car when possible. This was seen as a barrier to socializing and as a barrier to enhancing one's social life. Having a car for reliable transportation was a way to give more independence and freedom in socializing and engaging in outdoor activities. Even while indoors and without using transportation, doing engaging activities such as learning new skills was recommended.

The recommendation was made to push oneself to exercise, go to the gym, or play sports. Being active was stated as a good strategy to be successful. Being active and getting outdoors was stated as important, even when one might not want to go out. It was encouraged for newcomers to push themselves to do healthy activities, rather than coping by eating or crying.

Another healthy activity that was mentioned was getting out and meeting others in the community. “Help others and just mingle with them. Volunteer.” Getting out of one's comfort zone and experiencing life here was recommended.

> If you are going to stay in your comfortable zone, and it’s going to be years and years…. 10 and 20 years... that’s what I see, some people they don’t want to go out. Just create their own community with people like them. Just go out, experience, you learn a lot. Every time I meet new people out of my culture and even my religion, you become as a person who has better vision and you learn a lot.

Spiritual Advice

Women who were practicing Muslims were recommended to get connected to their communities. “Know that there are Muslim Student Associations; there are Islamic Centers. Try to be proactive about your personal experience. It's a two-way street. It's over there. But it's what you make of it as well.” Being proactive about one's experience also meant engaging in religious practices and holidays here in the US.

From the theme titled, inner strength and independence, women shared how they turned to God in times of need. They warned to other women not to forget their religion when they come here.

> Never forget your religion when you come here. Things that were forbidden in your country weren’t forbidden because of your country or your family. It was forbidden because of God, and God is everywhere. So, it should be forbidden here too. Even if there is no one to say ‘No,’ or even if there is no one to see you.

Women were encouraged to talk about their religion with others.

> And be a good representor of your religion and your culture. Don't be afraid to share about your religion and your culture. A lot of people say, don't talk about your deen. But if you really listen to a lot of people, in my experience, other people talk about Christianity. And they will ask you. Like, Daie or Daieah. A daie or daieah it's anyone who preach about their own beliefs so they can get more people to believe in their beliefs so they can follow it. You don't have to be that. But don't be afraid to share some information, or to clarify some misconceptions about you. So, stand for yourself in the most respectful way you can.

Women in this study wanted newcomers to know that they were representing Islam and the Arab world in the U.S. Women in this study wanted others like them to help in trying to eliminate the bad image of Muslim women in the West.

> And just try as much as possible to participate in life and to show them what Muslims are and how good people we are so we can eliminate this bad image that they show in the media about Muslims. The most important thing that we have to be more involved in the community. Yeah, that's what I want to say. Like we shouldn't be hiding with each other and not involving with the Americans or the society that we are living in. We should be more involved in the society.

Women in this study instructed newcomers to show others that Muslim women can go out and be part of society. "Do not put yourself in a closed environment." They wanted to tell women not to stay home or interact only with people from your culture.

> Always try to go out. Even if you don't have plans to work or continue school. Volunteer. Just be out. Show people that we are not people that just like to be by ourselves and not mingle with other people. Just go out. And try to be part of this community.

Women were encouraged to be brave. “I would say that it’s not going to be very easy, but they have to be courageous, and don’t be scared.” They were told to stop thinking about life back home.

> Just live your life the way it is. And just go on with whatever you have around you. Don’t keep thinking of how life was there, because it’s not going to be the same. No matter what, it’s not going to be the same. So, if you kept thinking of it, you will stay depressed and you will not do anything. So just live life as it is here and stop thinking about what was there.

As mentioned in theme titled, life in America is hard work, women wanted others to know that there is hard work to be done. They also wanted them to know that they can do it. “You are a foreigner. You are a Muslim. And you are a woman. So, you have to jump over these three hard obstacles to say, ‘Ok, people, you should forget about these three and I can do it.’”

Keeping Balance

Keeping balance was a recommendation made to be successful in transitioning and adjusting to life and study here in the U.S. Women were encouraged to integrate, and they were also cautioned to establish boundaries. Not to go too much one way or the other.

> Be careful. Have limits. But at the same time, blend in with people and the culture while conserving your own… Don't just go with the other culture and blend in when you are not ready yet. But at the same time, don't be so closed and refuse to have an open mind about things. Keep your boundaries, but have a balance between boundaries and being integrated. Not too much boundaries, or other way. Not go 100% into the other culture, but also not the other way. Try to integrate yourself. Try to embrace the new culture. Not too much to the point you don’t know how to deal with it. Step by step balance between

boundaries and integration. Women that try to have so much boundaries, and they don't get to experience the good life here or successful professionally, later try to look for job or interviews, it's harder. Integration is important and boundaries also important.

Women were encouraged to learn to balance the hard work they needed to do with other areas of their life. From the theme titled, life in America is hard work, one woman advised newcomers that

> they should also do their best when they come here for studying. It is natural at beginning it will be hard for them because of the differences with system and the culture and for a lot of things. But with time, they will make balance. They need to be patient and look to positive aspect and that is the major thing.

Women were instructed to try to be comfortable with their religious practices and dress, but also not to be uninformed of how others may perceive or react to them. "Realize where you are and try to be comfortable with it. You may not be comfortable coming out as a hijabi or Muslim and that's ok." They were told that they might hear others telling them not to wear hijab, or postpone wearing it, or wait until going back home. They were encouraged to try to be comfortable here in being an Arab, Muslim, and/or hijabi.

> Being a Muslim sometimes could be challenging in some ways, but a big part of it is you inside. When I first wore hijab, I wasn't as confident in myself as now. Maybe that's fine, because with time you get older, you get wiser, you get stronger, so don't always blame things around you. Sometimes there are some challenges inside you. Just be strong and go out there. If you face a challenge or two, an obstacle or two, it doesn't mean you change yourself, sometimes you just be patient.

This woman further encouraged newcomers not to be sensitive about being an Arab or a Muslim or a hijabi.

> Don't put the obstacles in front of you. Don't think that because you are Muslim and or Arab, wearing hijab or not wearing, things are not going to turn good. Believe in Allah. Do your best. Because it's also your qualifications that are going to play a big role. Just go there! If one job didn't work, it doesn't mean that's because you are Muslim. Maybe something or maybe some better candidate. Don't always be sensitive about it. It happens to everyone, even the Americans.

Although women were told that they should not expect difficulties, they were still instructed to be well-informed. They were advised not to assume that every religious practice is going to be accepted in every state. They were guided to have some awareness on how their clothing and dress may be perceived depending on the area that they live in, and not to generalize.

> If they are more interested in wearing niqab, it is better to find cities or states that people are familiar with wearing niqab. Not just to generalize that, 'Yes, American people respect people who are religious and niqab is ok.' Yeah, that sentence or that thing is ok, but not in all states.

Women were cautioned not to stick to their own bubble, or group. They were encouraged to engage with diverse groups. They were told not to judge others or groups solely based on their appearances, because you will miss out on gaining new knowledge and experiences.

> Just be open minded and friendly, not just with international students, with different races, because you will gain a lot of knowledge. I mean, you have a gift of having a lot of bubbles around you. Why do you choose to stick in one kind of bubble, your own

bubble? I see a lot, the African American groups would be by themselves, they are like a group of friends. The Caucasian by themselves, the Mexican by themselves. So, just go and learn about as many different people as you can. You will have knowledge. Surprisingly, you will find that you guys you share the same kind funny things, ice cream, or whatever. So, you will find some connection, while you are thinking like there is no way I can agree with something with this person…because of their look, mainly because of their look.

Women were encouraged to make friends, but also to choose them intentionally. They were encouraged to make friends and not be shy, and they were also reminded to be careful too.

When they move here I would say go make friends, talk to people, communicate. Don't shy away, don't be scared, there are good people out there whether they are Muslim or not. There are educated people. But at the same time be careful too, because there are some ignorant people as well, arrogant I would say.

Women were advised not to be shy and to ask for help, but also to know that there are both helpful people and hurtful people everywhere.

Be normal. Don't be shy. Don't expect people to read your mind. If you need help, just simply ask for it and you will find many to help you. American are not devils; they are regular people. They are kind. You can find bad people, honest people, lying people…as you can find these people everywhere.

Women encouraged newcomers not to judge others based on what they thought they knew.

First of all, forget about the American movies you are watching, America is completely different than the movies. Try to be open-minded. Accept people in their ways, to give

> them a chance to accept you in your way. Don't steer to anyone. Everyone is free to do whatever he wants. But just keep yourself busy by yourself, not by others. Never judge anyone without dealing with him. Never judge anyone because of how he or she looks like, or how he or she is wearing.

Women wanted newcomers to forget about the American movies they had seen and not to judge others by their appearances alone.

Women in this study wanted women who were coming here to the U.S. to know that it is ok to try to fit in, but one should also try to know your values and what is important to you. "Who you are is going to impact your experience. I think it's important to know who you are." Even though there might be a lot of pressure to fit in within this culture, they should remember that it is most important to be ok within themselves.

> Put a goal. Know why you are coming here. From now and then, check your goal, check your path. Are you in the right direction or not? Don't try to fit in, if you're not fit in with yourself, you won't fit in in the culture. You have to be comfortable with who you are, are you wearing the headscarf or not. You have to be comfortable of your nationality as a woman, as an Arab woman. And by fitting, you don't have to look like who you are fitting with. You can be totally different looking, different religion, different race, but your thoughts, your ideas, your values would be the same, and you will fit then. So be careful of the ways you try to fit in to the American culture.

Women were encouraged to, **"**Try to connect to and listen to other's experiences. But don't be delusional about completely positive experiences. But don't be stuck in people's negative experiences."

The advice was given to not be scared from propaganda, radio, or TV. To respect yourself and respect others, and as long as you are not harming anyone not to think anybody is going to come and harm you. To not assume people will be against you, and to come with an attitude that people are welcoming. "Don't come with an attitude that people are going to be against me because of my language or my religion." Women suggested for newcomers to go in with a good attitude, because things are not as scary as you hear. "Just come with an attitude, you know, things are not going to be as bad as you hear."

Women were guided to draw on their inner strength. "Yeah, that's one message I want to send. Just be strong." Women were encouraged that if coming to the U.S. is something they want to do, then just do it even if people are telling them not to. "I would definitely first say if it's something that you want to do, then go ahead and do it. Come to the US even if there is a lot of opposition." Women were further encouraged that

> even if there is a lot of people telling them not to come or advising them not to come, it's a very safe place. You will be respected as a woman and you will be valued. And just be patient, things will work out for you, with time.

Women were told they need to, "be able to make decisions…be smart…work hard. And enjoy life." Part of the hard work they will do is trying to find a balance between just that, working hard and living life. "With time, they will make balance."

Women gave thoughtful recommendations to newcomers based on their experiences. They were categorized by academic, social, and spiritual advice, and keeping a balance. Academic advice for success included recommendations to strengthen their English language skills, ask for clarification, and work hard. Social advice for success included recommendations to stay connected to family and friends back home and to build their support network here. To

include friends from different backgrounds, have a guide, find a mentor, get a car when possible, and to get out into their communities. Spiritual advice for success included turning to God for help and support, keeping practices, being brave, and showing a positive image of Muslims. Women shared the advice and wisdom to be patient and look towards maintaining balance. Keeping this balance included integrating, but also having boundaries. Fitting in, but also keeping one's values. Not judging others, and keeping a balanced perspective. These suggestions, advice, and encouragements were to help others who would come here to live and study in the U.S. be successful.

Accept and Accommodate Us

In this section, women shared their feedback. They shared positive feedback, or what they were thankful for in terms of treatment from others and accommodations. They also shared constructive feedback, or what they felt needed to improve and change in this area. Feedback included women's recommendations to their colleges and universities, their professors or their classmates, and to the researcher. This is their advice, based on their experiences, to faculty and staff and the researcher, as well as colleges and universities in general, on how to better accommodate and help women like them to be successful. Recommendations to the researcher were based on the process of participating in this research. They gave suggestions on ways to improve the research and on what they would like to see for future studies.

Appreciation

Women shared that there were certain things that they were thankful for. These were areas that they appreciated from others. Things that others had done, ways they were treated, that they felt were supportive and helpful. This was in the context of their academic environments in

Michigan and during the time of data collection from February through June of 2015. They describe the gratitude they felt for what was already being done to accommodate them.

Women shared their gratitude for the environment of acceptance and respect that some of them experienced in their universities. Women shared that they felt the environment in the U.S. was more tolerant than the environment in European countries. They believed that living in a university environment is more open and tolerant. Further, that Americans are more welcoming than other countries such as Europe. Having rules against discrimination in the U.S. was important to women.

> There are still individual instances or events that happened to different people, but at least the law is on your side and when you know that you are more comfortable. I am happy when I go to, for instance, to a leasing office and I see a big sign that says no one should be judged based on their race or religion or color. I just feel more comfortable. And I'm appreciative of this.

This woman stated that she was thankful for the general environment of tolerance and acceptance, and the strict rules in the U.S. against racism.

One woman shared that while she experienced people who did not appreciate her hijab, "there are some people that also respect it. Like, the religious Christians, I feel they really appreciate it. They don't have any problem with it." There were some religious people of other faiths that she noticed would respect her worship practices and devotion. Two women were grateful that their universities respected their practices by having a location for them to pray. The first women shared that "Even in college there was a special room for praying, and I felt that was really great and respectful." The second woman shared that she was at a school that was open

minded about Islam and had a masjid, a room for *salah* (prayers). She thanked them for being open minded.

> And we as Muslim students, we always worked on educating others about Islam and they were all open minded about it. So, it was nice to go to a university as big as this because we had our own culture, our own masjid. We were happy with our masjid.

She shared how often she utilized this prayer space given by the university. "I prayed there all the time, more than in my house. I would encourage other schools to have that one too."

Women appreciated when their coworkers dealt with them in a respectful and understanding manner.

> I work with very understanding and respectful coworkers. They are always interested in our cultural background, and language, and religion, and food and all of that. I believe that I was always respected when it comes to practicing religion and cultural practices.

Another woman shared that she felt her colleagues were accommodating, and more than just respectful, but actively engaging in supporting her and her faith practices. "They really, really, really, respect you, when they notice that you respect who you are, where are you from, and your religion." This woman felt amazed that her colleagues would remind her to pray and not eat in front of her out of respect when she was fasting. Even though they did not have to or need to, her colleagues would remind her of her prayer times when she forgot, and eat and drink in a secret place during Ramadan so as not to hurt her feelings. She thought they were amazing. She further expressed that she tried to convince people back home that Americans respect you, but that people back home would not believe her.

> They (Americans) really don't care if you are Muslim or you are Arab or any other religion. They just respect you. They (people back home) didn't believe me in the

beginning! ‘Ok, they didn’t deal with you in a bad way because you are Muslim? No. They didn’t deal with bad because of the hijab? No, they never. They didn’t make laugh about you because you are wearing heavy stuffs in summer for example? No, never.’ But sometimes they stop me and say ‘Oh, we like your outfit. It’s very good. Where did you find these clothes?’ or ‘Oh, we like the scarf so much. We like the color of the scarf.’ So, they are so friendly.

Another woman was especially thankful for the way she was treated as a Muslim who wore hijab. “I respect them for not feeling any point I am discriminated because I am a female and also Muslim wearing hijab.” She shared that after wearing hijab,

It was amazing. It was opposite of what I thought. I thought some people would start staring at me. They would have comments. Even the professors, especially they used to see me without. But the first time I went there and I met an advisor and it seems like he is seeing nothing. He didn’t even look at me twice. It was very normal. Which amazed me.

She was amazed that her professors acted normally with her after she began wearing the hijab, and that she had no issues with other students.

The students were so respectful, never had an issue. Even I felt the opposite, the student and the professor would respect you, and judge in terms of what you are giving them. How good you are in what are you doing, as a student or as a teaching assistant.

This woman was grateful that she was being judged by the quality of her work.

When it comes to religion, I thought it’s going to be different because of all the propaganda you hear. I don’t know if it was only my city or state. But I went to so many other states because of conferences. I never had a single issue being a female and a Muslim covering. I would hear some American female complaining, being a female in

this major. But also, this, I didn't feel it was an issue. I don't know, I was lucky…or it's a coincidence never been bothered. That made me love living here more and more. The respect I found from male for female, being Muslim female in this major.

Women thanked their professors for being mentors and for wanting to help them succeed. "Here, professors, superiors, teachers, and most of them, they do want me to succeed. Here they are more of mentors, not just professors." She went on to say, "I think they value the growth of the individual, whether it's in school or your job." Further, that some teachers or professors are hard to deal with, but she noticed that for a majority of professors they do not have the barrier of superior or inferior feelings. She was thankful for her experience with her advisor.

I think my advisor one of most influential people in my life that I met. I would thank her for being a mentor for me. Not just a professor or an advisor. Being there for me and allowing me to make mistakes, but yet correcting me too in a gentle and respectful way.

One woman especially appreciated that her professor would assist her in many areas, not only coursework. "I think in my department, my chair, he was really very, very helping, and I would really thank him for that, for everything he did to me." She detailed how he helped her with career fair announcements, resume review, and research.

He would help you in all processes. For example, anytime there is a career fair, he always sends me an email to tell me about it, that there is a career fair and you should come. He helped me review my resume and he did it several times, and he was giving me feedback all the time. Anything that I needed to do during my study, like the processes before doing my thesis, he was telling me what to do and helping me and stuff like that.

Women were appreciative of the teaching style that professors had. That they were treated respectfully. "A lot of them that I interact with them, in the class as a student, you don't

feel there is a difference, 'I am doctor and professor and you are student.' That was very nice." She was thankful for the relationship and for being given second chances.

> I appreciate the relationship between the professors and students. Even the way of teaching, they are flexible. They give student a second chance, for example, to correct assignment, or to give you more time if you need to improve your studying.

She was encouraged to learn. "I also appreciate the way of teaching, that they teach us… as adults, they allow us to depend on ourselves in reading, and making discussion, and participating." This woman respected that she was given extra time and was not laughed at, either in academia or in public.

> They know it's hard for you to explain a thing, and they will give you time, waiting for you to finish your point. And they trying to restate what you said, 'You mean like this? You mean like that?' And even they do not laugh at you if you say something by mistake. That's what I respect about them. A lot of people, even in the public life, not only education, in the public life.

Another woman shared how her professor helped to make things easier for her. That her professors were understanding. Her professors and colleagues make hard things easy for her with their special way of teaching and willingness to help her with assignments and exams. A different woman described most of her professors as respectful, humble, and sincere. "They are respectful. Some have a high ego, some of them are very arrogant, but a lot of them are very helpful and actually respectful." She shared that she would thank her professors for being very humble and for helping students. That many of them are very sincere in their job. "So I thank them for that and I thank them for working extra with someone who maybe having a hard time." She thanked them "for *itqan*, perfection in their job."

Women appreciated the value here that was placed on freedom of choice. “You have the freedom to make your own choices and make your decisions, with appropriate consequences.” Women encouraged professors who were treating them well to continue to do so. “I felt really equal with other students. I did not feel any discrimination in college. So, I think that is really great, and they should go on with that.”

Accommodation

Women asked for reasonable accommodations. They felt that others should change a little and do some adjusting too. They acknowledged what needs to change. Women had previously recognized areas back home and with people back home that could improve, and they recognized the same here in the U.S. With respect and understanding of both worlds, they noticed what they felt still needs to change here. They recommended what others can do to help facilitate this.

Women asked for respect. Having respect was seen as very important. Women called for increased respect from others and a sense of responsibility. Women wanted others to know that the way they act can either create a hostile or a welcoming environment. One woman felt that while she had developed a sense of responsibility and increased respect, that others should as well. “I think people have responsibility. There is a mix of empathy, but also lack of respect. This is not an excuse. You are not excusable. Their actions create a sense of hostility instead of welcoming people.”

Women asked for others to learn about them and to learn about their culture. To take the time to come and ask them questions when they are unsure about things. Not to make assumptions.

> I am not oppressed. And stop having some ideas about me. If you have something don't just imagine things and Google it. Just come and ask me. I am the author of my life, so you are not going to get any information from anyone better than me. Just come and ask me.

She requested that rather than having your own ideas and imagination in your head about different races, cultures, and religions, to ask people questions, get to know them, and be open-minded.

> Whoever is not American or from a different country, take time to know them even if it's like five minutes the first time you see them. And they would learn, the professor would learn a lot of things too.

Women asked their professors to read a bit about their culture and become familiar with it.

> I think it's important for American professors to educate themselves a little bit about different cultures. Let's say you are a professor and you have a student from the Middle East, maybe read a little bit about that specific culture before communicating with the student.

Women especially wanted others to know that shaking hands with the opposite gender is not okay for all of them.

> In the American culture, shaking hands is very important. It's very rude when someone doesn't. And I sometimes get confused because as a Muslim woman it's not acceptable to touch men. And many students are not familiar with this. And it is very, very hard for me when a professor just came to you and say 'hi' and you say, 'I am sorry I cannot.' It's hard. I did it once. Once a student came to me and was very excited, and he said, 'Hi, my name is …' and I said, 'I am sorry. I am Muslim. I cannot shake hands.' And I felt, this is

> something you will feel it when someone was very shiny and just closed down, it's very not acceptable. I wish American people would know about this thing.

Women asked for others to reach out to them. They recommended for student organizations to reach out to Muslim students and ask what their needs are. One woman described how she had lived and studied in another country where they would have a group of students who would come and interview people. She recommended them to do something like that. To have student organizations meet with different minority and cultural groups to have those conservations and ask what their needs are. She shared that at this university they recognized that the Muslim students were there and would ask things like, "How can we make their stay over here more comfortable?" They provided halal food in the cafeteria and a prayer place. They would ask, "What individuals who identify as people of religion, what do they need?" She explained that this was important. "Because that's part of their sense of belonging and that is important for their academic success."

Women asked for more patience and understanding.

> I would say maybe be a little bit more patient. Because sometimes when there isn't a fit, or when there is a gap in communication, or there is miscommunication because of cultural differences, professors sometimes get frustrated and that can affect the relationship between the professor and the student."

Women asked for "understanding that a lot of us coming from Middle Eastern culture are very hesitant asking for help because of fear of embarrassment." Women wanted their professors to

> realize that as a student coming from a different background or different culture, they may have different expectations that what an American student might have. Different expectations, different ways of thinking and processing things. Just deal with it more

> patient, and give that student the extra time to complete assignments and or to ask questions and make sure that they have the right tools to succeed just like any other American student.

Women asked to be given extra time to complete work. “Just giving students a little bit more time to adjust, especially if they are brand new students in their first semester.” They wanted professors to be “making sure that the student understands the assignment, and understands what is expected of them.” Recall from the earlier section in this chapter on challenges in academia, women found that studying independently and more strict expectations of timeliness were challenges for them in adjusting to the academic system here in the U.S. Being given extra time to submit their work, as well as extra one-on-one time with their professors to explain assignments, was requested.

> Even if it requires additional time, an additional one on one meeting with the student, and I know that professors are very busy and this may not be realistic, but in order for the student to succeed, sometimes you may need to do that.

Women asked to be given extensions on holidays. They felt that it should be okay to have extensions on their holidays. They felt that for that one day it should be permitted to not have to turn in an assignment or take an exam. They felt that they should be able to take holidays off.

Women asked to be given a place to pray. Recall from the section on challenges in finding a prayer space, earlier in this chapter, that women had a hardship trying to get back and forth from the mosque or different buildings to pray in. That it could take up to an hour to get there and back, and this did not include the time necessary to perform the ablution and prayers. Women requested that each building, especially the library, should have a designated area where students could use to pray. “I really wish the library to have a masjid there.” One woman

recommended a multi-prayer room divided by curtains for the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths. “Why can’t we make one room in each building for multi religion? Especially for women.” Another woman explained that

> for other religions, prayer is once a week maybe. But for Muslims it's five times; five times a day. And I was so lucky because a lot of my colleagues are Muslims and they understand that. But sometimes some people maybe feel embarrassed to pray in the middle of the room while other people are working or walking. A prayer room will probably make a difference in people's life. Especially that praying is very important for Muslims.

Women asked for additional housing. They requested better collaboration with the university to provide all-female dormitories. They explained that some parents would be more comfortable with this. “Especially for females, it’s difficult for our culture for her to come here by herself.” This woman explained that female students coming from overseas struggle to find appropriate housing, because it is all mixed. To help parents of Muslim females feel more reassured, having dormitories available for females only was requested.

Women asked for sensitivity regarding their diet. They wanted halal food to be provided in the cafeteria. “I don’t want to say people have to cater to me, but to be sensitive. Sometimes we are sensitive to Jewish populations that have cultural food. So, I think just religious groups in general when it comes to things like dietary stuff and social activity.”

Women asked for more professional and social events without alcohol. They wanted opportunities to socialize for those who do not drink. “For events, for social events, I would like it to be no alcohol.” This woman felt that socially it was contradicting being in a professional field and being around stuff like that.

> I don't think it's professional. But having social events that are not around alcohol, I would have liked. I think that in itself would have helped me connect socially. And maybe having events that are social so I can have that opportunity to be in the "in group' and connect to people away from those alcohol based socializations.

She felt that when there was a social activity that was professional and related to professional development, they discriminate against or exclude students who do not drink. She felt this really impacts professional development, because a lot of connections and networking happen in those events. "I think it can further isolate Muslim students. Impact their sense of motivation. I would say to be sensitive."

Women asked for international houses to facilitate socializing and learning the English language in a fun and friendly way. One woman recommended having an international house with free snacks and drinks and activity planning. She recommended for this to be a building in a central location on campus. There would be language tables there where you would gather and teach languages like Arabic, Mandarin, and Spanish. She had seen something similar. "It was basically a place for international and American students to meet and to learn more about each other's cultures."

Woman asked for recruitment of more international students and professors from different backgrounds. Having professors that were from different backgrounds made students feel more comfortable speaking English, and less pressured on not making mistakes. Although some were scared, cautious, or hesitant speaking initially, upon talking to professors and friends from international backgrounds things became easier. Again, part of the reason why this was stated as easier was because many professors and students who were internationals also did not speak well. Women stated they were comfortable with them and it did not make them feel stupid.

Woman asked for recruitment of more Muslims. More recruitment of females from the Arab world was recommended. They wanted to see recruitment done by the university and not just the individual professors. “The more Muslims that can come here and continue school and educate themselves, the better image we can have.”

Woman asked to bring in Muslim professionals as speakers and to have a place for discussion. Universities and professors were asked to have seminars where they bring good examples of Muslims. “This way the community is more aware that we are just like each other.” Women asked for an opportunity to be made for them to talk and share their experiences. They described this as a place where normal Muslims can talk and share with others.

Women asked to be put in touch with mentors and professors from similar backgrounds. One woman specifically asked for female Muslim advisors. She recommended to assign women to a female advisor, and even better a Muslim, to talk to the parents from overseas to explain how life is here and what challenges the advisor would be willing to help with. From an earlier section in this chapter on challenges, one woman shared how her experience was surviving the system. She felt that her energy had been focused on just getting through and she had not built professional connections to help with her job search. “I feel like I lost having mentors to consult with. I feel like that was part of the impact of having to learn to navigate a system with discrimination in it.”

Women asked to be provided with a safe environment for learning. They recommended having discussions to make staff or students more sensitive about simple cultural stuff. “A lot of Muslim students have difficulty wearing hijab.” This woman shared that it took seven years of schooling until she reached the point where she found an environment where she felt she could talk and it was relatively safe. She asked for religion to be included in class discussions. “I would

encourage them when they include diversity to actively talk about religion. And talk about how a religion can be a minority in graduate school." This woman felt that religion should be incorporated as part of diversity discussions. "We talk about a lot of cultural diversity, but religion is rarely brought up."

Women wanted others to have respect for them, be patient and understanding, learn about them, and reach out to them. They asked for extra time on work, extensions for holidays, an accessible place to pray, and more all-female housing options. They asked for sensitivity to their diet, more alcohol-free events, and an international house with language tables. They wanted more recruitment of international students and professors, and Muslim students and professors. They wanted to see Muslim professionals invited as speakers, and female Muslim mentors, professors, or advisors available to them. Women in this study asked to have a safe environment for learning and safe spaces to talk and share.

Research Process

The women in this study gave conscientious and thoughtful responses. When reviewing their story summaries in the follow-up phone call, several women went into detail requesting grammar corrections to their own quotes. They shared that they did not realize they had been making grammatical errors until they read what they were saying. It was important to them that their stories be depicted accurately. This reflected in the feedback that they gave to the researcher on the research process.

When asked how their experience was with the research process and any recommendations they had to improve the process, women responded with the following:

> Overall, I think I enjoyed it. It definitely made me feel more reflective and conscious and aware of my experience. And how my whole journey until today impacted me through

school. Helping me think about what can I do right now to get the support right now and to reach out. The advice about what I would give to other women, helped me with my next transition. Made me feel appreciated. I appreciate your work. It has a transformative impact. I enjoyed it overall, I think it was helpful. Although I don't know the other people you interviewed. I feel connected, to the other anonymous people. It feels empowering for you to be part of this group. As a Muslim woman to do what you're doing. Something empowering in having your story witnessed by others. Being Muslim women students. I know I am part of the bigger group….I feel like it's more comfortable and easier to be open and transparent. I feel like I won't be misunderstood. I feel trusting. Knowing you good enough and I trust that my narrative, my personal story, will not be intentionally skewed or misportrayed, especially in a setting where it has. Comfort, trust, openness.

It was very nice….Actually it was a wonderful experience. I like the questions and the answer. And I hope to help other women. I hope my answer will help Muslim women. And it was very confidential and secure and I felt comfortable talking to you, and I appreciate the work, and I appreciate the topic you chose. And it's easy it didn't cost me anything or take a long time….I remember you said you can share whatever you are comfortable with. And I mean the whole process and the confidentiality. I think everything was Masha Allah, organized, formal….Thank you I appreciate it. It was a wonderful speech and I also enjoy this experience and I find it very amazing. I wish I can invite other women to do the same.

I read it yesterday and it was amazing. You just summarized everything in a perfect way. Even if I have a chance to write it myself, I'll never do it as you did….Just during this

trip, coming here and since I started my research, I have learned a lot it life. I didn't mean in science, but I really meant in life. Yes, there are some things that I lost. But when I think about it, I feel happy that I lost it because now I understand why I did….I like it so much. The interviews are very flexible and accurate. Everything is perfect. I wish you good luck. Masha Allah.

I am looking forward to the results….I am very satisfied with it. You had good questions. I am really concerned about security and confidentiality and you are making a big deal about it, that's good, my opinion you are doing a good job.

I just think that you should publish. You really should try and publish it because there are not many studies out there that look at Middle Eastern women….It was good, I felt easy.

I truly think it went very smooth and very clear.

It was good, I felt very comfortable telling it to you my story…. I felt me telling and you typing was good way to tell it….I found maybe because it was at this location it was quiet and I was comfortable there. And don't know if outside it would be as convenient.

Good, you are very patient and ask really good questions and detail oriented. I like that. I think you are pretty organized and adamant and punctual about appointments and gave enough time for.

I think it was fun to participate and I was choosing the times so it was comfortable and convenient.

When asked for feedback on future studies, women recommended to do more of this kind of research.

Maybe getting more women involved is better. Different ages, different backgrounds. To come up with a coherent conclusion….Broaden participants, increase

backgrounds….Middle East or north Africa is homogeneous. Muslims in other parts of the world, different cultures.

I think maybe if there is more people participating this will make the results more generic. For future studies, to continue with larger groups from a statistical point of view more accurate.

One suggestion. Send the questions you would be asking ahead of time. It can help me process. I know sometimes in the moment it can be helpful too.

In summary, women gave specific recommendations for how to help students like them succeed. Women provided feedback and recommendations for academia and scholarship. They were thankful for the things that were being done well, and they wanted to see more of that. They wanted to see open mindedness, respect, and acceptance from others. They asked for extra time for work, extra time for explanation, additional prayer spaces, and advisors with similar language and cultural backgrounds. They wanted others to reach out to them and to learn about them and their culture. They desired safe environments to live, learn, and socialize in their colleges and universities. They wanted their colleges and universities to recruit and educate more female Muslim students from countries around the world. They were thankful for this research being done and wanted to see more research of this kind to help women like them.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Transition and Adjustment Experience

The purpose of this qualitative dissertation was to give voice to the Muslim woman experience in transitioning and adjusting from the Arab world to the American world. The research questions in this study were (1) what was it like to experience the transition and adjustment, (2) what changes were seen in life and study in this new American world, (3) how were these changes dealt with, (4) what advice would be given to newcomers like them, and (5) what advice would be given to others to help women like them. The phenomena of interest, their lived experience, was analyzed in depth using the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 1998). Rich interview data was collected and analyzed. The researcher's expectations and reactions were explored and documented. Individual experiences of Arabic speaking, Muslim women who attended institutions of higher education in the U.S. were deeply contemplated and understood.

The women in this study had been living in the U.S. for at least a year and had opportunities to experience life and learning in higher education settings. Seven themes emerged from their stories. Each theme was given a title by the researcher that reflected the content of the theme. Themes naturally emerged within the chronological timeline of women telling their story. This was the timetable beginning from life back home before they moved and ending with the present time, having lived in the U.S. for one year or more.

The seven themes that emerged were grouped into three processes. These processes were transitioning, adjusting, and succeeding. The shared experience of women in this study is summarized below by each process. This was the real, daily lived experience that women shared

in their processes of transitioning, adjusting, and succeeding in life and study in the American world. A few select quotes from the results chapter are included.

In the transitioning process, women were preparing for and then making the physical move to the U.S. The themes in this process were (1) It's hard to say goodbye, and (2) Just like in the movies? Women recall what life was like back home, what the reasons were for leaving home, and what the experience was like initially upon arrival.

Back home before moving, women described being surrounded by friends, family, food, and love. They described feeling included and greeted by familiar faces, and feeling at home. Either by choice or by circumstance of need, they said goodbye to all of this. It was hard to say goodbye (theme 1). Complicated feelings and a mixture of emotions arose during the departure. "Part of your heart feels so happy, I will be free. And the other part feels selfish to leave the one who you love just for yourself to feel happy."

Women were thrust into a new environment upon arrival. They questioned whether it was going to be just like in the movies that they saw (theme 2). "Where is the beautiful U.S.A. that I heard about?" They were in this new environment where the streets look different, the "high quality cars" look oddly large, the buildings look new, and "everything is organized, everything is clean." The pictures and images seen beforehand were not quite the same as seeing the reality. They observed that "in the U.S. it's not all these movies that you see Chicago and Detroit and New York and Los Angeles. It is not only the U.S." They realized that there was a lot of diversity. There was so much more than only those big cities that they saw in the movies. "There is more in the U.S. than Chicago and New York and Los Angeles."

In the adjusting process, women were adjusting over time and experiencing many aspects of life and education. The themes in this process were (3) I miss this, and (4) Life in America is

hard work. Women began to realize all the aspects of life that they missed from back home. They began to experience many more day to day challenges. They became aware of what the hardships were during the adjustment. They also recognized the many tasks that needed to be completed. They exerted hard work and effort while adjusting.

The familiar environment, along with friends, family, faces, tongues, food, clothing and dress were all left behind and all dearly missed (theme 3). “It was a different kind of social life.” Women faced a plethora of challenges. They shared challenges faced with housing and roommates, finding places to worship and practice, developing or strengthening English language skills, finding transportation, and experiencing discrimination. They shared that people dressed differently and went to different places for fun than they were used to. Women explained that it was hard if they were unmarried to search for a spouse from the same religious, language, or cultural background among all these different types of people.

Life was becoming very busy with daily tasks and the work it takes to adjust to a new academic environment and educational system (theme 4). “You have to keep working, keep working, and focus.” The realization set in that life in America was hard work. “Coming to the U.S.A., miracles would not happen by themselves. The U.S.A. system and the culture and the respect gives you opportunities and pushes you, but it’s you that needs to do the hard work.”

In the succeeding process, women recognized how they were changing to be successful. It was in this process that a shift was identified by the researcher where the adjusting was still occurring, and yet there was a clear sense by women of what worked and aided to ease the adjustment. The themes in this process were (5) Home away from home, (6) Inner strength and independence, and (7) Respect and understanding. Women developed their support networks and their inner strength and independence, and they increased respect and understanding of others.

By this point in time, women knew what worked and what strategies were used to thrive. By this time, they had become aware of what aided or eased their adjustment and could articulate that.

Women shared that they coped and adjusted successfully by developing this home away from home, sense of inner strength and independence, and views of respect and understanding towards others. They coped with the loss of their support system by developing a new one. They fostered their development in areas that would make them internally strong and independent. They learned to respect differences. They dealt with the hardships of discrimination by developing an understanding of others.

> Women shared they had felt that this was the time where they needed to push themselves.
>
> You have many weak points. You are a foreigner. You are a Muslim. And you are a woman. So you have to jump over these three hard obstacles to say, 'Ok, people, you should forget about these three and I can do it.'

Women shared that they picked themselves up and decided that they can do this. They can make it. They were going to succeed. There was not another option. Women decided they can succeed at their goals in a way that stays true to their religion and to themselves.

Women described that they built their support network (theme 5). They made a home away from home, where their family and friends back home were a daily part of it with voice and video chats. "You feel that you are with your family, because you see them every day, you see them every time, and talk to them every day." They kept in touch with family and friends through these chats and social media, while building new and supportive relationships here with others from both similar and different backgrounds. They stated that they intentionally chose to "develop social circles" and interact in ways that they would dictate. Choosing to go places that

were both religiously and culturally appropriate was important to them. Places that they would enjoy and feel comfortable socializing in were sought out.

Women shared that they became stronger and more independent after some time (theme 6). They developed their inner strength and independence through strengthening their faith, learning to advocate for themselves, and developing new skills. They learned to turn more to God in times of challenges. They practiced prayer and supplication in times of hardship and challenge. They tried to look at the positive aspect and focus on the positive side of everything. Women shared that they figured out how to speak up for themselves. They learned to speak about their faith and their beliefs with others, advocate for their needs, and develop new daily living skills. They felt that they became more patient and self-aware. They expressed that these changes helped them succeed in reaching their academic and personal goals.

Women shared how they developed their views of respect and understanding after having lived for some time in the U.S. (theme 7). They shared that they wanted to respect themselves and to respect others. They developed a deep sense of understanding. They articulated the views they had developed on discrimination, American and Americans, people back home, and themselves. When people hurt others, they tried to look beyond the hurtful words to make sense of where that was coming from. They tried to look for the best in people. Women did not appear to assume internal negative attributes for other's external bad behaviors. They gave them excuses for their bad behaviors. They appeared to make a choice that they would not internalize bad attributes upon themselves or others. They seemed to make the choice that they were not going to make assumptions about people or to generalize. They had been hurt by others generalizing about them, so they did not wish to do the same in return and hurt others by generalizing about them. They shared that just because one person was bad with them they were not going to

believe or assume that everyone would be that way. They tried to "see people as individuals and not generalize negative experiences onto everyone over here."

After spending much time here, women developed respect for people. Their experiences led them to see that "there are a lot of good people here." They recognized that there were differences, but they also do not want to be biased like everything that they had seen in the media. "People tend to judge quickly, not based on facts but based on media and stereotypes." They shared that they wanted to respect others and take time to understand them. They shared that they wanted to take the time to know others and learn what might be shared, or similar, with them. They wanted to see the humanity in people. Their image of Americans improved and they also learned to recognize things back home that could improve. They developed more openness and understanding of differences.

In the recipe for success section of the results chapter, women gave academic, social, and spiritual advice to newcomers for success. Women also advised newcomers to keep a balanced lifestyle. Through reflecting on their own experiences, women shared this advice and feedback. By this point in time, women had successfully adjusted and were ready to give this advice. They now knew exactly what it would take for someone coming in their situation to be successful here. They had learned the recipe for success when transitioning and adjusting to life and study in a new country.

In academics, women strongly advised newcomers to learn English before they come. They recommended taking English classes before arriving. Women further advised newcomers that after arriving they should continue to work on strengthening their English language skills. English was stated as the first key to success here. Women also wanted newcomers to know that they needed to learn how to ask for clarification. They felt knowing English was important, but

that clarification was also essential for good communication. Women told new students that they would need to work hard. They advised newcomers to just keep working hard and to focus, and that in time they would reach their goals.

In their social life, women advised newcomers to keep strong ties with those who were supportive of them from back home. They encouraged keeping in close contact with family and friends overseas by using technology. They particularly recommended video and voice chats and social media. They advised newcomers to do this while also building and maintaining a support network in their new home, their home away from home. This would include seeking out diversity in friendships, guides and mentors, and opportunities to engage with their communities. Seeking out reliable transportation, learning the transportation system or how to get around, and getting a car whenever possible was also advised.

In their faith, women shared spiritual advice and guidance for newcomers. They shared faith practices that worked for them in the past during hardships and challenges. They also shared advice they would desire to follow for themselves in the future. They encouraged newcomers to keep turning to Allah for their needs. Women shared that they wanted newcomers to know that they would represent Islam here. They asked newcomers to show others that Muslim women studying in the U.S. are not the same as the negative image they see about Islam in the media. They told newcomers to be brave and to keep their faith practices.

Newcomers were advised to maintain a sense of balance in their life. This meant having good boundaries while also being part of the U.S. society. This meant learning which places were safe and comfortable for interacting, and staying true to one's values. Newcomers were advised to try not to judge others and to respect others, just as they would not wish to be judged and would wish to receive respect. The women in this study provided detailed advice and

recommendations to newcomers on how to succeed here. Women gave clear and specific advice to newcomers on how to be successful in their transition and adjustment to life and education in the U.S.

In the accept and accommodate us section of the results chapter, women shared what they were thankful for from their professors, peers, and colleges or universities. They gave thoughtful thanks for when they felt respected, dealt with professionally, and when they were given extra time, assistance, and patience. While many thanks were given, many requests were also made. Requests were recommendations for improvements they saw that needed to be made. Women had a lot of feedback to give for their professors and their university to help students like them be more successful. They provided detailed responses to how others could best help women like them.

Women specifically asked for more time to complete their work and more attention given in explanations of assignments. They wanted accessible prayer spaces in every building and additional housing that would truly only be for females. They desired to have culturally congruent options for socializing. This would include events that were alcohol free and offered meals that were sensitive to their diets. They desired to see more Muslim students recruited, more Muslim professors recruited, and more international students and professors recruited in general. Women shared that they really wanted to have female Muslim mentors, advisors, and professors to work with them. They wanted their colleges and universities to bring in positive images of Muslims by inviting Muslim professionals as speakers. The women in this study wanted outlets to share their experiences, such as seminars and safe spaces for sharing. They asked for their professors, colleges, and universities to create safe environments for them to come and learn in.

Women also wanted and requested acceptance from others. Just as they had learned the importance of respect for differences, they wanted others to learn this as well. They wanted others to learn about their backgrounds and their cultures. They desired for people to reach out to them and to ask them about their needs. Women made very specific requests for accommodations. Women requested that academic institutions and professionals make these changes to help them to be more successful and feel more included.

Connections to the Literature

Discrimination and the Media

Discrimination and the negative media image of Muslims impacted women's experiences transitioning and adjusting to life and study in America. This is consistent with previous literature (Zogby, 2002; Erickson and Al-Timimi, 2001). Discrimination and media image impacted both the choices that women made during adjusting and the image they developed of America and Americans. Muslim women in this study stated that they experienced discrimination and that they developed ways to navigate in a system with discrimination in it. Muslim women in this study shared that they wanted to work harder to show others that Islam and Muslims were not all like what was seen in the media. Further that the media only showed what was negative, and not the positives.

Women in this study shared that they wanted to look at the positive aspect in everything. They appeared to share a view on discrimination that was consistent with their faith. In this perspective, one cannot know or assume another person's intentions. One cannot assume that they can see what is in the heart of others. Saying someone committed an act of violence or oppression based upon discrimination means giving them a bad intention in their heart. This

means that they intentionally completed a hostile act against a person based upon their race or religion.

Some women in this study stated they did not always wish to assume that a negative event or response was due to discrimination. Several women did identify as having experienced discrimination in job searching, in employment settings, in academia, in airport security, and in customer service. One woman stated that although she hated discrimination, she would seek to be more understanding of where discrimination comes from. Other women did not identify as having experienced discrimination, but shared stories with negative or confusing interactions with others. The word, discrimination, inherently implies that one is giving a bad intention to the person or people in front of them. That they are acting and speaking based on ill will or ill feelings towards your minority group. Women did not appear to make this attribution of ill will or potentially may not have wished to use this specific terminology in English due to their faith perspective.

Some examples of a tendency of women not to attribute a negative act or experience to discrimination and/or to look for understanding of the causes may be found in the results chapter sections on discrimination. Women expressed in their interviews that they did not want to assume others were acting badly towards them because they were Muslim.

> Maybe they might be honking at you because you are a bad driver or you did something wrong. Or that maybe a job did not work out because there was a better candidate. Or that there was a possibility that an individual might be saying things because they dislike all religions, not only because one is Muslim.

Women stated they did not wish to expect to be treated negatively by others. One woman explained that if she were being tested, or tried, because she was Muslim, then she would be

happy because this would be a test from Allah. In fact, women stated they desired to educate others on Islam. Women stated they believed that when others were questioning them or even verbally insulting them, that there was always a possibility that the person was simply uninformed about Islam, was curious, and may possibly wish to learn more. “If they ask you, it doesn’t mean they want to harass you. They ask you sometimes because they are curious. They want to know more.”

Women stated they believed that there were underlying circumstances that led people to commit acts of violence, even murder. The example of the Chapel Hill shooting was given by one woman. She stated she knew it was a hate crime, however, she felt it necessary to look at how it developed to that point. Further, women stated that they did not wish to judge others based on how one person may have interacted badly with them.

Women in this study shared that they did not wish to generalize one person’s bad behavior to others. They expressed that they did not want to make assumptions that because one person treats them badly that everyone will be that way. They shared that they wanted to deal with people as individuals. They explained that they did not want to judge people based on what they saw in the media, or based on one bad experience they might have had with someone who looked similar to that person.

This view of not generalizing bad experiences may have been a protective factor for the women in this study. Previous literature stated that hearing about discrimination towards their ethnic and religious group had a great impact on the image Arabs and Muslims had of America (Erickson and Al-Timimi, 2001). Prior literature further asserted that discrimination impacted the Arab and Muslim experience living in America and their choices made while adjusting to life here (Zogby, 2002; Erickson and Al-Timimi, 2001). Their decisions to move here and then to

stay here were affected by their awareness of discrimination. This awareness did not often occur until it was experienced first-hand after some time living here and interacting with mainstream society.

Women in this study appeared to make the conscious choice that when they experienced or heard about discrimination they were not going to generalize that everyone is like that. This may have been positive and aided the adjustment. This may have allowed them to feel more comfortable as they explored social circles with diverse groups. Further, the view that someone who approaches them and questions them may just be curious and need more information about Islam may also assist to ease the adjustment. It may have fostered hope in them that when they educated more people about Muslims and Islam, that these acts of intolerance and discrimination could decrease. Discrimination impacts the choices that immigrants make to come to the U.S. and/or stay after transitioning here (Zogby, 2002; Erickson and Al-Timimi, 2001). Over time, the women in this study shared that they developed understanding surrounding issues of discrimination and shared views of respect towards differences in people. They stated that this assisted them in successfully coping with the hardships and challenges they faced.

Women in the study responded to discrimination in a manner similar to Arab-American and Muslim organizations in the U.S. (Smith, 2010b). Arab-American and Muslim organizations had responded to the backlash towards their community by increasing education. They responded by working to change the media image towards Muslims. The aim was that greater visibility of Muslim Americans would reduce the sense of otherness. Advertisements made condemned terrorism and reiterated that Islam does not promote terrorism.

As shared by women in this study, the media image had a negative impact on shaping views of America and Americans prior to coming here and living here. Before coming to the

U.S., women thought that America just started wars all over the world and that the American people would not be friendly to them. It was not until they arrived here and lived among the people here for some time that their views changed. They shared that they realized that there were American people here who were very friendly and supportive, and that nobody likes war. They learned that people were different from their government, and not to judge people by what their government does. Just as the women in this study realized that the views that they saw in the media of America and Americans prior to coming here were biased, they also saw that views towards Muslims are around the world were biased by negative media portrayals.

Women appeared to react to media bias by wanting to be positive representations of Islam in America. They stated that they desired to show others that Muslim women can be in society and can also stay true to their faith practices and values. They stated that they wanted to work very hard academically to show others that their work and their perspective were valuable. They shared that they wished to see the negative image of Muslims in America change, and for the media to show more positive examples.

Muslim women at the University of Colorado at Boulder responded to the backlash against their community since 9/11 through outreach programs via their Muslim Student Association (MSA; Stadlbauer, 2012). These women desired to change the negative media portrayals of Muslims as foreign, backwards, and/or un-American. The outreach and educational programming of MSAs are just one example of what Muslim female students and scholars across the U.S. are doing to promote peace and advocate for deeper understanding.

Acculturation, Identity, and Acculturative Stress

Women shared in the section on the research process of the results chapter that they felt connected to other women in this study, even though the other women were anonymous. This

psychological connection to people with a common place of origin was important. Past literature has described this connection as their ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992; 1996). Women in this study encouraged newcomers not to isolate themselves or to stay in their own bubble, or to be with only one group or another. They encouraged newcomers to go out and experience others with diverse cultures and backgrounds, while also maintaining close ties to Muslims and Arabic speakers.

The advice women gave to newcomers may have been reflective of the women having an achieved ethnic identity, or one where they have explored their ethnic group membership and then committed to their ethnic minority group (Phinney, 1992; 1996). There was one aspect of their advice which may fit well with a model of acculturation. This advice was that they encouraged newcomers to not only stay within their own group, but to explore other groups as well. It is possible that this reflects the acculturation model which integrates their ethnic group membership with majority group membership (Berry, 1997). This is called the bicultural status.

The bicultural status is the same, or used interchangeably, with the integration category in the acculturation model (Berry, 1997). In integration, the individual shows strong identification with both the majority and the ethnic group. It is possible that women were encouraging newcomers to engage with other groups in order to guide them to the exploration necessary to reach this achieved ethnic identity status. Once newcomers had explored other group memberships, this might then facilitate a stronger commitment to their ethnic group and lead to the achieved ethnic identity.

For the women in this study, they stated that it was important to keep a balance and not to go too far one way or the other. This balance perspective seemed to include their views on their identification with the ethnic group. Since women were coming from countries in the Arab

world, their ethnic identities may have already been salient. Once again, the women may have resembled the integration or bicultural status of acculturation where they are interacting with both the majority group and their ethnic minority group. The women in this study may have also been practicing cultural switching, where one who is bicultural switches back and forth between identities depending on the group they are with and context they are in at that time (Ozyurt, 2013). This may have been what women in this study referred to as developing their social circles and interacting in ways in which they would dictate to be comfortable within those circles.

The women in this study talked about keeping a balance. They recommended not going too much one way or the other. This appears to be slightly more in depth than categorical acculturation statuses of integration, or bicultural. The recommendations for keeping a balance may not be fully reflected through the categorical approach found in some models. This balance may be consistent with descriptions of the process of selective acculturation.

Women in this study sought out friends and colleagues in their same religious and cultural group. Having Muslim and Arabic speaking friends, colleagues, and/or professors may have been a protective factor. It may have minimized the feelings of otherness of being a Muslim in America. Women in this study described that at different points in time in their transition and adjustment experience they preferred to be with Muslims and Arabic speakers, and other international students or professors. They shared that made them feel better when they were developing English competencies. At other times, women described they preferred to get out and interact with diverse linguistic, cultural, and/or religious groups. They shared that this made them feel as though they were experiencing life in America. This may reflect their selectivity, or selective acculturation.

Women appeared to not want to engage unless they felt comfortable within the new environment or situation. They also shared they only wanted to be in environments that did not conflict with their faith practices and values. Using selective acculturation, Muslims in another study retained the importance of family, expected roles and family members, and their religious observances (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006). They further separated aspects of life that were Muslim and that were American. This also appeared to be a strategy used by women in this study. As mentioned in the paragraph above, they reported that they selectively chose which groups to interact with. They preferred and sought out environments in which they could maintain their religious observances. Women specifically spoke of alcohol and drug-free environments, as well as places that were sensitive to their dietary needs. In their requests for accommodations in the results chapter, women asked for halal food to be provided in the cafeterias.

Religious identity has been discussed in past research as part of identity development for Arab Muslims and possibly as an ethnic identity in and of itself (Haque-Khan, 2014; Fayek, 2004). It appears unlikely that religious identity development may be separate from ethnic identity development for Muslim women with origins from the Arab world. There has been some discussion of the difference between an ethnic religious identity and a personal religious identity. The personal religious identity is one that would be freely chosen rather than simply adopting the ethnic group practices that are religious. In other words, women would choose their religious identity freely and not simply because it was ingrained within the culture in which they lived in. The women in this study appeared to have both freely and internally embraced Islam. They did not appear to be attending activities and performing practices as part of the existing social structure in America. Although this may be explored within their home countries, within the U.S.

this seems to be unlikely since the majority group culture in America does not practice as they do. Women had to intentionally seek out other Muslims to attend and perform religious practices with in the U.S.

In a prior study, religion and religious values were incorporated as part of the ethnic identity measure for Arabs (Barry, Elliott, & Evans, 2000). Religion was not viewed as separate from development of family values, sense of belonging/ethnic pride, friendship, and ethnic practices. This is consistent with the results of this study. The religion of the women in the study did in fact appear to shape or play a major role in their development of each of those areas. Women appeared to be developing and/or reshaping their religious identities during their transition and adjustment experience. One women discussed how she felt it was very important to her to learn Islam in America.

When women in this study discussed developing inner strength and independence, one method in which they did so was through turning to Allah in times of hardship and challenge. In Arabic, the words *Allahu Akbar* mean that God is Most Great. This means that God is greater than any challenge or circumstance. These words are repeated with each movement within every one of the five obligatory prayers, and commonly repeated 33 times after completing the prayer. This faith belief that God is greater that any challenge or circumstance appears to be consistent with how women in this study described their perspective. They described that they turned to God in time of hardship and challenge for support. One woman shared that at one point when things were very difficult for her that she saw God as her only support and only friend.

The development or strengthening of faith, along with learning to advocate for themselves and learning new skills, appeared to foster the academic and personal growth of women in this study. Women in this study were transitioning and adjusting to a new country and

culture. Some women may have been making their first transition to undergraduate or graduate studies. Most women were likely undergoing some level of career exploration and making academic choices that would impact their future careers. This was in addition to studying in a new language for some and to a different educational system. All of these factors may have also been reflected in their need to develop and foster new skills and independence.

Development of inner strength through faith appeared to foster women's sense of competency, self-efficacy, and independence. Their faith development appeared to occur simultaneously with their increased self-awareness and commitment to self-care. One woman shared that she became more aware over time that she could pray in a public place; however, when she first arrived she did not know she could do this. For most women in this study, the way they discussed performing their obligatory prayers at the prescribed times and engaging in other worship practices appeared to be acts of self-care.

Women in this study shared that their spiritual understanding was that people are different and that God created us that way. This may have developed from their interactions with many people who were different from themselves, or this may have been a way of thinking they already had prior to moving to the U.S. Either way, this perspective appears to be consistent with an Islamic perspective. As illustrated by the Qur'an verse below, God made people into different nations and tribes so that they may know one another. This seems to be consistent with the way women discussed getting out into society, seeking experiences with diverse groups of people, and showing that Muslim women can speak and interact with others in positive ways.

> O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of

you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things; *Quran,* 49:13).

Religious identity development did not appear to be directly associated with clothing or dress. The political, economic, and social context were all asserted to shape the immigrant experience; however, hijab and clothing or dress was not stated to have had an impact (Ozyurt, 2013). For the women in this study, there did not seem to be any evident difference in their transition and adjustment experiences based upon their clothing or dress. The women may not have all been physically identifiable as Muslim, depending on dress, but their names or accents or practices would lead others to identify them. Their practices of praying and fasting could be most recognizable. In addition, they may have told others around them that they are Muslim. The women in this study were all practicing Muslims who had been raised in the Arab world. And this may have been the reason for the strong and overarching similarities in their experiences, not necessarily whether they were wearing hijab or not.

Although wearing hijab did not appear to have a different impact on most aspects of the transition and adjustment process, such as family, holidays, traditions; however, there may have been some differential experiences in terms of discrimination. It is also possible there may not have been. This would be an area of further exploration. Particularly wearing niqab, or the face veil, as this was specifically stated by women in this study as not acceptable by others in some parts of the U.S. From past research, there was no clear information as to whether a woman wearing hijab or niqab would experience a more difficult transition or adjustment experience in comparison to a Muslim woman who was not wearing either (El-Geledi & Bourhis, 2012).

Muslim women are making their voices heard (Smith, 2010a). Arab and Muslim Americans have been given the responsibility of explaining to the world about Islam (Smith,

2010b). The women in this study appeared to take on this responsibility. They asked newcomers to take this on as well. By participating in this research study, they made their voices heard just as Muslim women in the West are making their voices heard through speaking out on their faith and making contributions in many professional fields (Smith, 2010a). This appears to be very consistent with what the women in this study were saying. Through their hard work and scholarship, they stated they wished to show others they, as Muslim women, could do it. Over time, they also shared that they developed the inner strength needed to speak out about their faith with others.

Past research with Arab males showed that they were psychologically healthier and had higher self-esteem when they were not integrated (Barry, 2005). They developed stronger ethnic identities when they were immersed within their culture of origin. Most theories assert that it is psychologically healthier to integrate. In this study, this difference may be explained by the balance and selectivity the women spoke of. This balance they spoke of with not going too far one way or the other may be reflective of integration. Being integrated means that there is somewhat of an equal balance of importance placed on maintaining one's culture and developing relationships within mainstream society. Women in this study appeared to assert this importance of having connections to their culture and faith, as well as society at large. Integration was found to decrease the amount of acculturative stress experienced (Berry, 2005). This culture conflict and stress is typically seen as reduced when the person is integrated and most stressful when they are marginalized.

Past literature encouraged attention to be given to the transitional experience (Carter, 2014). For the purposes of this study, transition was considered as the movement from country of origin to country of migration. Adjustment was considered as the subsequent experiences and

changes that occurred following this transition. There was importance in asking during interviews about both pre-and post-migration or transitional experiences. A few women in this study fled their home countries due to persecution or war. This is considered a pre-migration trauma and acculturative stress levels are expected to be higher in cases like this (Hovey, 1999). By beginning the interviews in this study with having women explain about life back home, they identified those experiences. One woman shared rich data on what appeared to be pre-migration trauma. She shared how this impacted her and her family having to flee her home country without being able to notify or say goodbye to friends and extended family.

There were a few factors seen in past research that were associated with lower levels of acculturative stress (Hovey, 1999). Being married was one of them. A few women in this study spoke of the challenge of searching for a spouse within the U.S. This may show some support of past research that being unmarried may be more stressful for female students who are Muslim and Arab. One woman specifically mentioned that she had been questioned by others within her own cultural, linguistic, and/or ethnic group on why her parents had let her come to the U.S. alone. This was not seen as desirable by some members of her group.

Less acculturative stress was also related to attending worship services and having positive expectations of the future (Hovey, 1999). Both of these factors appear to reflect the experience of the women in this study. Women shared their desire to look to the positive aspect in everything. Women also shared that they were practicing regularly and spoke of attending their mosques for a *halaqa* (religious speech) and for *Jummah* (Friday prayers). They also spoke of being active in outreach through the MSA. They recommended that newcomers should know that there are Islamic centers and MSAs here in America. They recommended for newcomers to attend them and participate in their activities.

Women in this study discussed maintaining strong ties with their religious and ethnic culture and fostering those identities, while also building new support networks within the mainstream society that would not conflict with their personal values and practices. This may have been consistent with the literature on religious identity development and selective acculturation. The experience of women in this study may also have been consistent with the experience of second generation immigrant Muslim women (Ozyurt, 2013). After second-generation Muslim women were interviewed, the acculturation or identity statuses did not appear to be as relevant as how the individual formed their narrative. This narrative included their experiences both pre and post migration. This may have been true for the women in this study. Identifying or categorizing them with acculturation or identity statuses may not be as important as understanding their daily lived experiences. In depth and rich descriptions were obtained through this qualitative study on how Muslim women adjusted successfully by building their social network, developing their inner strength and independence, and increasing their respect and understanding of others.

Unlike most identity and acculturation models, the three processes discussed in this study show the end result as a positive outcome. The processes were transitioning, adjusting, and succeeding. There was no option not to succeed. Women talked about it like this. They shared that they had to work hard and push themselves. They did not appear to discuss or share any challenges related to questioning whether or not they would eventually be successful in their academics, or in their transition and adjustment process. This perspective and positivity, despite the many challenges reported, may have further advanced them to success. The beliefs these women developed appeared to have positively impacted the way they dealt with and coped with

the transition from their country of origin to the U.S., and how they successfully adjusted over time.

Applications

The results of this study have implications for clinicians. Women gained in depth knowledge and self-awareness throughout their experience in the U.S. During the interviews, they articulated this. Participants in this study were engaged in the interview process. It appeared that these women needed outlets to share their experiences. Having female Muslim counselors on staff for female Muslim students may be a source of support and comfort. Increasing outreach as part of the recruitment process for hiring in counseling and therapy positions may assist in this.

Women in this study shared that they felt connected to people from a similar cultural and language background of Arabic. Providing women with additional support and outreach seems to be reasonable, and yet, what they asked for specifically was for professionals from shared cultural, language, and/or religious backgrounds. Connecting them with local supports and/or helping professionals from similar backgrounds is ideal. Connecting them with supports nationally through Muslim and Arab health, mental health, and academic networks is also very valuable.

Health professionals should become aware that Muslims may be experiencing a backlash towards their communities. They should become aware that it may be a common experience for Muslims in America to experience discrimination. Further that the way each person views discrimination may be impacted by their faith, their image of America and Americans, their image of people back home, and the changes occurring within their own identities. Anti-discrimination policies should be made clear and be readily available for Muslims. The women in this study stated that it made them feel better to know that there were laws against

discrimination. Connecting women with anti-discrimination agencies and assisting them in the reporting process may be necessary. Educating women on what offenses are reportable and where to report would be an important step to assist them when navigating a system with discrimination.

It is vital for professionals when interacting with Muslim women immigrants to have some knowledge of their background and experiences. As part of orientation and/or training, the stories of these women could be read. These stories need to be read to really understand the transition and adjustment experiences of Muslim women living in America. Reading the section in the results chapter on these women's recommendations is very important for helping professionals working with this population.

The stories shared allow the reader to become familiar with the context, expectations, and perspectives of Muslim women. Islam was their self-identified religion. More so, Islam appeared to be their way of life and they stated that their faith practices played a main role in their success and progress. These women desired to educate others and break the negative media image of Islam and of Muslims.

> I am not oppressed. And stop having some ideas about me. If you have something don't just imagine things and Google it. Just come and ask me. I am the author of my life, so you are not going to get any information from anyone better than me. Just come and ask me.

Muslim women from the Arab world moving to live and study in America may benefit from having more outlets to express their experiences. Increasing opportunities for women to share and connect with others is recommended. Additional outreach through offering mentorship, advising, counseling, and/or support groups may be useful. Helping professional may aide or

ease the transition and adjustment by fostering environments of acceptance and assisting women in obtaining accommodations.

Helping professionals may facilitate establishing environments, or safe spaces, where both Muslim students and professionals can come together to discuss and address their issues. Considerations of clothing and dress, opposite gender interactions, prayer schedules, dietary restrictions, and alcohol should be made when establishing these safe spaces. Women in this study recommended having student organizations reach out to them to ask them what their needs are. It seems it would be beneficial for health professionals to initiate this outreach effort as well. This may promote learning, dialogue, conflict resolution, and positive changes.

It is recommended for helping professions to explore transition and adjustment experiences in counseling and therapeutic settings. Sensitivity to these processes and knowledge of the reactions women shared in the results of this study would be useful. Take, for example, the common question of asking, "Where are you from?" Recognizing that many women from different parts of the world may have not necessarily been in one place their whole life. It may be hard to answer this question in a simple way for women like this when asked. They may wonder whether to answer on where their parents were living, what their country of origin is, what country or countries they spent most of their time in, or what country or countries they migrated to. These have the potential to all be different for women who have moved here from the Arab world. This is reflective in the section of results chapter that describes their backgrounds.

Asking specific questions may help to prevent discomfort or lack of clarification when getting to know women from the Arab world. It may also assist to reduce triggers or recollections of pre-migration trauma. This may be especially helpful when moves were not voluntary or when students were refugees fleeing from war. More specific questions may be

helpful. Examples of specific questions might be, “What country or countries were you raised in? Where did you grow up? Where have you lived? Where were you born? What is your ethnic background? Where were your parents born or raised? What is the ethnic background and religion of your parents?”

Knowing and being aware of how female Muslim students may feel about their way of life allows a health professional to move away from labels of what is healthy or unhealthy, adaptive or maladaptive. It may also aid in the diagnostic process and minimize misdiagnoses. Depressive disorders and adjustment disorders may be more commonly misdiagnosed for these students. Clinicians may consider offering these experiences and advice that women gave in their stories to clients. Hearing suggestions on how to make the transition and adjustment easier from others who have undergone this experience may be empowering for clients.

The results of this research have applications to holistic health and positive psychology. Using the processes outlined in this study, there is not an option to have an end result that is psychologically unhealthy. The processes were transitioning, adjusting, and succeeding. The processes result in a successful transition and adjustment. The focus is on a positive outcome, and one in which the individual is seen holistically. Their academics or English language competency are not the only focus of study. There is an acknowledgment and inclusion of the many facets of their lives and identities that impact their transition and adjustment experiences. In this study, this included experiences with faith, family, friends, and socializing. It also included experiences with practical aspects such as housing and transportation. Religious and ethnic identity development were seen through responses that reflected changes to their views and practices over time. Successful coping strategies were identified and evident.

Personal and spiritual beliefs appeared to guide the women in this study when dealing with others who were different from them and when dealing with acts of discrimination. They did experience challenges in many areas; however, these challenges were seen as opportunities for growth rather than maladjustment, mental illness, or adjustment disorders. Challenges were seen as a test from Allah. "Allah is challenging me and wants to see my reaction." Being tested by Allah was viewed as positive. In Islam, a common belief and understanding is that there is a reward for the trials one bears with patience and prayer. "And even if something happened to me because of my religion, I am happy because it's a challenge."

An application to treatment in counseling and counseling psychology is preparing clients for an outcome that is going to result in psychological health. This should be the goal regardless of whether students decide to stay or leave, or how they proceed academically. Part of the adjustment may be making decisions when it might better for them to return to familiar and accepting environments. This could still be viewed as a success process in that they would have learned about themselves and have explored new environments and determined which were best for their well-being.

The results of this study have further implications specifically for academics. Women made requests for reasonable accommodations. These included more inclusivity in social and professional events, as well as more diversity awareness and training on religious minorities. Since identity development is shaped within the context of one's environment, women need these safe places to learn and grown. Muslim women in this study asked for safe spaces to be created to talk and share with others and for a safe environment to be created for them for learning.

Higher education institutions have been criticized for not providing better programming to facilitate social life and identity development for Muslim women (Mir, 2014). Even for American raised Muslim women, challenges were shared with finding leisurely activities on college campuses that did not include drinking, dating, or fashion and dress that was culturally incongruent. To find safe places where they fit in and could be themselves, American Muslim women had to create their own environments on college campuses. This is consistent with what the women in this study described. They had to seek out others who would be supportive of them and environments in which they could socialize. They requested their colleges and universities to do better at providing this for them.

Institutions are recommended to review requests women make. Women asked to be given extra help and explanations on assignments when needed, extra time to complete their work, and extensions on their religious holidays. Women in this study had asked for others to learn about them and reach out to them. Of importance might be to become familiar with political and economic crisis in their countries of origin that may be having an impact on them. Advisors and professors may be able to better assist their students when they are familiar with the situations in their home countries. Additional assistance in areas such as job search, career development, and housing search may be helpful. Women were very appreciative when their professors helped them by reviewing their resumes and sending them information on career fairs and job openings.

From the results of the study, it also appears that it is very important, if not essential, for universities to make arrangements for prayer spaces. This appeared to almost more of a plea than a request that women made. Several women shared how difficult this made the transition and adjustment for them, not to have places to pray in each building they were in and at each prayer time. Academic institutions are recommended to follow through with implementation of the

accommodations requested by women in this study. Recommendations from Muslim women to create an environment of acceptance, respect, accommodation, and inclusivity are very important for institutions to implement.

Future students considering study in American universities may benefit from the results of this research. This has implications for student recruitment and retention. The advice women in this study gave on how to best adjust and cope over time may prove to be very beneficial for new students. The recipe for success found in the results chapter may prepare them for not only the academic experience, but the overall transition and adjustment experience. Better preparing future students prior to arrival may result in a better experience with the processes of transitioning, adjusting, and succeeding. Particularly, informing them on how to prepare before making the transition, what to expect upon arrival, best strategies for adjustment over time, and best strategies for success could be very useful. Hearing recommendations in the words and language of other students who have undergone this process may resonate stronger for newcomers than hearing from academics.

Fostering this deep understanding of Arabic speaking, Muslim immigrants to the U.S. may have greater relevancy and application beyond academia and counseling. In a world where fear and misunderstanding are prevalent, this type of education and awareness may assist to reduce notions of otherness. War impacts every part of this world today. Fear of the other and inability to reach peaceful resolutions are abound. War abroad and hate crimes at home are plaguing the U.S. Collaboration efforts are needed with Muslims in America to reduce violence and work towards shared goals of peaceful resolutions. The stories of the women in this study may increase the knowledge base and awareness of the experiences of Muslim women in

America. The stories of the women in this study may serve to minimize fear of the other and help to promote collaboration and understanding.

Boundaries and Future Research

This qualitative study was bound by the participants and the questions that were selected for the interviews. The boundaries of this study were that applications should be focused on Muslim women. Specifically, those who have immigrated to live and study in the U.S. for the first time from the Arab world. This study may or may not reflect the experiences of Muslim males or of those students who may have chosen to return to their home countries and not complete their studies here.

This study was also bound by the public and media image of Muslims at the time of data collection. This may or may not reflect the experiences of Muslim women in the future depending upon the future political climate and trends. Further, women in different parts of the U.S. or in other countries may have different experiences of transitioning and adjusting. This study reported the in depth experiences of nine Arabic speaking Muslim women living and studying in Michigan. Future research may explore areas that were outside the boundaries of this study.

Additional research in this area of transition and adjustment experiences seems very important. In feedback given to the researcher, women were thankful for this research and wanted to see more of this kind of research done. They wanted to see more research done to help women like them. Future research may include further study of Muslim women who have immigrated to the U.S. Any differential experiences of Muslim women wearing niqab may also be explored more in depth. Although the hijab may be becoming more commonplace for

Americans to see in the West, niqab continues to appear to be less readily accepted by the public. Women in this study made this point.

There is a growing Muslim refugee population around the world. Their experiences, as well as those of international students and other immigrants, need to be heard within the U.S. and abroad. Their voice has a need to be recognized. To continue to focus on research with the Muslim immigrant, international, and refugee populations may increase the knowledge base in counseling psychology. It may also increase the literature base in closely related fields of social work, counselor education, and international relations.

Women is this study also made recommendations for future studies to include more diverse groups. Future research may explore the transition and adjustment experience with other linguistic, cultural, and religious minority groups in the U.S. Future studies may wish to explore the experiences of children and men, as well as women. It may be further beneficial to explore in depth the experiences of adolescents during their transition and adjustment. Ethnic and religious identity development may be further examined for those who are entering the U.S. for the first time as adolescents. With the increase of families fleeing from war and persecution abroad, this may aid professionals with development and delivery of culturally competent services.

The women in this study had been living in the U.S. and attended institutions of higher education. Future studies may wish to examine students who decided not to stay. These students may have chosen not to continue or complete their education after coming to the U.S. and experiencing life and education here. Research like this could be done in their home countries. Research studies abroad may examine the choices made and the factors that led to their decision to return home.

Research studies abroad may explore the reasons for not leaving home of prospective students. These might be students who were identified as showing interested in studying in the U.S. and then for one reason or another decided against it. Including parent responses and feedback in this type of research may be useful. Understanding these decision-making processes may shed light on the ways in which professionals and academics may improve to accommodate this population. Research like this may also assist universities in being more competitive during recruitment and more appealing to international students.

Using a focus group interviewing method may also be beneficial in future studies. This method may be particularly beneficial for exploring challenges, as well as what aided or eased the transition and adjustment. Women in this research study mentioned that they felt a connection to other women from similar linguistic, cultural, and religious background. Having them interviewed with other women like them together may facilitate dialogue leading to additional disclosures and responses.

Experiences with life and study in America may change depending upon the political environment and public image. Future studies may consider combining aspects of longitudinal studies within a qualitative framework. The same group of women may be interviewed over time. The suggestion would be to interview them quarterly during their first year of arrival. For example, an interview questionnaire may be completed within one month of arrival, after three months, six months, and then at one year post arrival. Data collected from a study like this may provide rich stories on transition and adjustment experiences. The processes of transitioning, adjusting, and succeeding could be further explored in this manner.

Longitudinal studies might also follow students on their next transition following successful completion of their degree programs in U.S. institutions of higher education. Those

transitions could potentially be back home, to a new country, or to another location within the U.S. Attention to their job search experience and career goals may further the research on career development of international students and immigrants.

Interactions with peers, professors, and coworkers within academics and in the world of work could be explored more in depth in future research. Career development questions could be included during interviews. Questions of this nature within the qualitative interviews could explore the impact of daily experiences in the classroom, academic goals, and career plans and goals. Qualitative interviews could also be combined with culturally appropriate quantitative measures, such as a career assessment. Including career assessments, with translation of the questions in both English and Arabic, might be a beneficial strategy to explore this area more in depth.

The stories that these women shared were truly in depth. It was clear to the researcher that they had much to share. They gave feedback to the researcher that they felt comfortable in their interview environments and in sharing their stories. The researcher is a Muslim, female, bilingual Arabic and English speaker. It is this researcher's recommendation to provide future participants engaged in this type of research with the option to also have a same language and/or same faith interviewer.

Future research on Arabic speaking, Muslim immigrants to the U.S. is needed and may particularly benefit the fields of psychology, social work, and academia. The voices of immigrants in America need to be heard. Their experiences and their stories need to be told. Academics and health professionals may benefit from applications of these stories to the populations they teach and serve. The general public has also shown a desire and an interest to

know, learn, and hear about the transition and adjustment experiences of immigrants to the American world.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Script

Assalaam Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatu (May the Peace, Mercy, and Blessings of Allah Be Upon You),

I am contacting you today to request your assistance in providing information to potential participants, or volunteers, about my research study. I am a graduate student who is completing this dissertation research as part of the requirements of her doctoral degree program.

Alhamdulillah (All Praise and Thanks to Allah), I am Muslim, and I feel this strong desire to educate others about Muslims. I am also of Egyptian descent and a bilingual English and Arabic speaker. This research is very meaningful to me.

My research study seeks to give voice to Muslim female college or university students, eighteen years of age or older, who are transitioning and adjusting to life and study in the U.S. There have not been many studies done that interview women from the Arab world and share their stories for others to learn and benefit from. This research may, In Shaa Allah (God willing), increase our knowledge and understanding of the experiences of women who practice Islam, live and study in the U.S., speak English and Arabic, and have moved here from a predominantly Muslim country in the Arab world.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience to notify me of your willingness to share a flyer about my study with potential participants through email, print, website posting, bulletin board posting, or other social media outlet including Facebook or Twitter. The flyer inviting participants to this study is provided here for your convenience. The flyer indicates the requirements for participating in the study, including the selection criteria, time commitments, and audio recording of interviews and follow-up phone calls for the purposes of data analysis. Audio recordings will be deleted after data analysis is complete. Please direct any potential participants to me, and please note that participants selected for the study will be compensated for their time.

I pray that the results of this study may educate others on the daily life of a Muslim woman who has moved from the Arab world to live and study in America. I am requesting for you to circulate information about my study via email, posting, or social media. I look forward to hearing back from you on this at your earliest convenience.

Also, please note that once enough participants have been recruited for the study, I would wish to contact you again to remove the flyer from circulation or posting. Please provide me as well with the best contact information to reach you in the future.

Jazak Allahu Kheir (May Allah Reward You With Good).

Wa Salaam (With Peace),
Sister Nancy Hammoudah

Appendix B

Initial Contact with Potential Participants

Assalaam Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatu (May the Peace, Mercy, and Blessings of Allah Be Upon You).

Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahiim (In the Name of God, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful),

I am talking to you today to discuss my research. You have been invited to be a volunteer to participate in my research study. My name is Nancy Hammoudah and I am a Muslim, hijabi, Egyptian, graduate student. I am doing this research as part of the requirements for my PhD program at Western Michigan University. I would like to explain the research criteria, the selection process, the consent form, and the interview process. I would also like to schedule an interview should we confirm that you meet the criteria for the study and should you decide to volunteer to participate.

As a reminder, my research study seeks to give voice to Muslim female college or university students, eighteen years of age or older, who are transitioning and adjusting to life and study in the U.S. There have not been many studies done that interview women from the Arab world and share their stories for others to learn and benefit from. The results of this research may give voice to Muslim females studying in American colleges and universities. This research may, In Shaa Allah (God willing), increase our knowledge and understanding of the experiences of women who practice Islam, live and study in the U.S., speak English and Arabic, and have moved here from a predominantly Muslim country in the Arab world.

In order to meet the criteria to participate in this study, you must be an adult 18 years of age or older, female, Muslim, English and Arabic speaker, college or university student, lived in the U.S. for about a year, and moved from a country of origin in the Arab world. Can you verify that each of these statements is true for you? Can you also verify whether you need anyone's legal permission to give consent to participate in research, or whether you have a legal guardian? Last, can you confirm that you are able to speak, read, write, and comprehend in English without assistance? This is very important, as the consent forms and interviews will be in English. Also, may you please verify that you have fluency in Arabic as well?

(*For participants who meet criteria)*

Wonderful! Just to explain again, the first 8 to 10 participants who meet criteria for this study will be selected to participate. At this time, I am still recruiting volunteers to participate. Please feel free to share the flyer for this research study with others you may know that might be interested to volunteer.

Please know that in order to give your permission to participate, you will need to sign a consent form prior to beginning the study. Now, we can do this by mail if you would like to have

your 60-90 minute interview by phone, or in person if it is possible for us to meet in person for the interview. Where do you live?

(The participant will be allowed to select their preference for a phone interview or an in person interview when possible. In person interviews will be offered at an agreed upon a public location that affords privacy for the interview)

When we schedule for the interview, we will need to be the only two people present. This is required for privacy, confidentiality, and to reduce distractions during the interview. I will be recording our voice conversation to write up our interview word for word in order to come up with a summary of your story, and later to come up with themes that emerge across everyone's stories. There will be no video recording. Only voice. I will be taking notes as well.

Audio recordings are the method of data collection for this study. Data analysis in this study occurs by reviewing verbatim (word for word) transcriptions of the interview and follow-up phone call. This word for word transcription can only be obtained through having a voice recording of our conversations. I will not be capable to write up our conversations word for word during the interview itself or follow-up phone call, as I will need to be focused on asking questions and selecting appropriate follow-up questions. Thus the audio recording is essential in order to perform the data analysis of this study, and audio recording is required to participate in the study. If you choose not to be audio recorded, you will not be eligible to participate in the study. Once audio recordings have been transcribed and validated, and data analysis is complete, the recordings will be deleted.

(*For in person interviews)*

Great! Let's schedule a time and a tentative location to meet. I will contact you prior to the interview time to confirm the location. At the beginning of your interview day, you will be provided with a consent form to review. You will have the opportunity to ask questions. We may only proceed with our interview that day after I have received a signature on the consent form.

(For phone interviews)

Great! Please give me the address you would like me to send the consent form to. I will include a pre-paid, pre-addressed envelope for you to send back one copy of the signed consent form. You may keep one copy for yourself. We may only proceed with our scheduled interview time after I have received your signed consent form. Now, let's schedule a tentative interview time.

(For all interviews)

Please remember, participation in this study is voluntary. That means you can freely choose not to participate or to stop participating in the study at any point in time without any consequences. For those who choose to participate, the consent form will need to be signed prior to starting the interview. The interview will last 60-90 minutes. We will start with some background questions about you, and then begin the interview. The interview will be audio

recorded. After the interview is complete, you will be compensated with a $25 pre-paid visa gift card. Should you choose to stop participating prior to completing the 60-90 minute interview, you will not receive the $25 gift card as compensation. After the interview though, your participation in the study is not yet complete. The researcher will send you a summary of your story for you to review, approximately one to three months after your interview has been completed. Please keep in touch with the researcher with any changes to your mailing address, email, or phone during that time. I will need your feedback on your story, and will schedule a 20-30 minute follow up phone call for you to give me that feedback. This phone call will also be recorded, and I will also be taking notes in order to improve my research findings.

(For participants who do not meet criteria or who contact the researcher after data collection has been completed)

Thank you so much for your time and effort in contacting me to volunteer to participate in my study. At this time, I cannot schedule an interview with you to be a participant in my research study. I thank you again for contacting me, and wish you the best in all your future academic endeavors.

Wa Salaam (With Peace),
Sister Nancy

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Assalaam Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatu (May the Peace, Mercy, and Blessings of Allah Be Upon You).

Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahiim (In the Name of God, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful),

I want you to know that I am very excited to have you as my volunteer, and I am really looking forward to hearing your story about how you moved to live and study the U.S.

Just to remind you, I am a graduate student who is undergoing this dissertation research as part of the requirements of her doctoral degree program. Alhamdulillah (All Praise and Thanks to Allah), I am Muslim, and I feel this strong desire to educate others about Muslims. I am also of Egyptian decent and a bilingual English and Arabic speaker. This research is very meaningful to me. My research study seeks to give voice to a unique population of Muslim females who are transitioning and adjusting to life and study in the U.S. There have not been many studies done that interview women from the Arab world and share their stories for others to learn and benefit from. This research may, In Shaa Allah (God willing), increase our knowledge and understanding of the experiences of women who practice Islam in a college or university setting. This research may also, In Shaa Allah (God willing), assist in improving college and university programming.

It is the aim of the interview to share individual experiences, thoughts, and ideas about what it has been like as a Muslim woman from an Arab country moving to and living in the United States. My purpose is to learn what your experiences have been in transitioning to and adjusting to this country and culture. The timeline of the today's interview process is 60-90 minutes, and in one to three months a 20-30 minute follow-up phone will be scheduled to review a summary of your story. As a reminder, the interview and follow-up phone call will be audio recorded and later transcribed for data analysis. Audio recordings are needed in order to write up word for word transcriptions, which are the primary method used to analyze the interview data in this study. Audio recordings will be deleted after data analysis is complete.

I am going to ask you a few questions about your background before we start our interview. Answering these questions will help me to obtain demographic information about you.

1) **Name:**
   Address:
   Phone:
   Email:
2) **What is the best way for me to reach you?**
3) **Do you expect to keep this mailing address, phone number, and email for at least the next three months?**
4) **What is your date of birth? How old are you?**

5) **Where were you born? What is your ethnic background?**
6) **In what month and year did you move to live in the U.S.?**
7) **Did you move to the U.S. with others? Have family or friends already living here?**
8) **Are you married? Have children?**
9) **What country or countries do your family currently live in?**
10) **How often do you visit your country of origin?**
11) **What countries have you lived in or traveled to? I would like to get an idea of your exposure to different countries and cultures.**
    (Please tell me, from childhood to present, the countries you have lived in or visited and the approximate dates or length of stay)
    Example:
    Country. From ___ to ___
    Egypt. From birth to age 20, 1990 to 2010
    U.K. 18. For a 1 month visit in 2008
    U.K. From 2010 to 2013
    U.S. From 2013-present
12) **What is your student status?**
    Undergraduate Graduate In State Out of State International Other _____
13) **What is your highest level of education completed?**
14) **What is your major or field of study?**
15) **Do you speak any languages in addition to Arabic and English?**
16) **Do you identify with a specific method of teaching or learning in Islam?**
17) **Do you wear hijab? Niqab?**
18) **Please select from this list the religious practices you keep here in the U.S., and those that you kept when you were back home.**
    Daily Prayers (Salah): In U.S. ____ Back Home ____
    Fasting (Sawm): In U.S. ____ Back Home ____
    Charity (Zakat): In U.S. ____ Back Home ____
    Reading Quran: In U.S. ____ Back Home ____
    Memorizing Quran: In U.S. ____ Back Home ____
    Going to Mosque: In U.S. ____ Back Home ____
    Other _____: In U.S. ____ Back Home ____

Appendix D

Interview

Now we will begin the interview.

1) **Please start by telling me about what life was like for you before you moved to America.**
   Probes: Describe your religious practices, family life, cultural traditions, social life, education system, and/or work life in your country of origin.
2) **What were your reasons for moving to the United States?**
   Probes: What made you decide to come to the U.S.? What were the circumstances that led to your move to the U.S.?
3) **Tell me about what it was like when you first left home**.
   Probes: What was it like leaving your home country? Who did you say goodbye to in your country of origin? What or whom did you miss the most? How did leaving impact you, your family, and your friends?
4) **Tell me about what it was like when you first arrived.**
   Probes: What were your initial experiences in America? What was life like during the first few weeks that you lived here? What surprised you most when you first came?
5) **Tell me about what life has been like adjusting over time?**
   Probes: What have your personal experiences been in adjusting to living here in the United States over time? What has this experience been like for you?
6) **How has it been practicing your religion and your cultural traditions?**
   Probes: What has been your experience in respect to religious practices? Cultural traditions? What practices or traditions were kept or lost?
7) **What has been your experience with education here?**
   Probes: What has been your experience with the education system? With the university, professors, and classmates? With communicating in English vs. Arabic? With courses, studying, tests, or assignments?
8) **How have your relationships been with your family since you moved here?**
   Probes: What has your experience with your family been like since you came to the U.S.? What has your experience been with immediate family? Extended family?
9) **What have your social experiences and social life been like since you came?**
   Probes: How has the move affected your social circle? What do you do in your free time or for enjoyment? How have your social experiences and social life been different since you moved to America?
10) **What has been challenging for you in terms of transitioning and adjusting to life in the United States?**
    Probes: What obstacles or barriers have you experienced? What sacrifices were made? What or whom has made things most difficult? Please share any experiences of intolerance or discrimination that you feel comfortable to disclose.
11) **How have you dealt with these challenges?**
    Probes: What did you do to change yourself, your thinking, or your lifestyle? How have you coped with the obstacles and barriers you experienced?

12) **What has been helpful for you in making the transition and adjustment to life here?**
Probes: What or who were your sources of support? What or whom has been most helpful?
13) **How has your experience of living and adjusting here changed you?**
Probes: How has this changed the way you see yourself? How has this changed your worldview? How has this changed or affected your life? Your future plans? How has it benefited you?
14) **How has your experience of living and adjusting here changed the way you see others?**
Probes: How has it changed your image of America and Americans?
How has it changed your image of people back home and your home country?
15) **What would you like to share with other Muslim and Arabic speaking women who are planning to move to the U.S.?**
Probes: What would you say to them? What would you recommend for them? What advice would you give them when they first arrive? What advice would you give them on how to adjust to life here?
16) **What feedback would you give to your university, professors, or classmates from your experience as a Muslim and Arabic-speaking women studying in the U.S.?**
Probes: What would you ask them to improve on? What might you thank them for helping with? What would you recommend for them to help more with?

Appendix E

Thank You Card

Thank you for your participation. Please remember to check your email or postal mail within the next one to three months. I will be sending you a summary of your story that you shared with me. At that time, we will schedule a 20 to 30 minute follow-up phone call, which will conclude your participation in this study. Please remember to notify me of any changes to your mailing address, email, or phone.

Jazak Allahu Kheir (May Allah Reward You With Good).

Wa Salaam (With Peace),
Sister Nancy

Appendix F

Story Summary for Review

Assalaam Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatu (May the Peace, Mercy, and Blessings of Allah Be Upon You),

As we discussed following your interview, included is a summary of your story. During a 20-30 minute follow-up phone call, I will ask you questions about this summary to check its accuracy with you.

Please contact me to schedule this follow-up phone call as soon as you receive this.

Jazak Allahu Kheir (May Allah Reward You With Good).

Wa Salaam (With Peace),
Sister Nancy

Appendix G

Follow-Up Phone Call

Assalaam Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatu (May the Peace, Mercy, and Blessings of Allah Be Upon You).

Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahiim (In the Name of God, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful),

I am contacting you today to review the summary of your story that was previously sent to you. I would like to validate your story with you. As a reminder, this follow-up phone call will be audio recorded and later transcribed for data analysis. Audio recordings will be deleted after data analysis is complete. I will start by reviewing the major points extracted from your personal story.
These are the salient points I found with your story (*describe points here from their story summary).*
Is there anything else you feel is important for me to know about your story?
Do you have any correction or comments for me about your story summary?
Is there anything further you wish to share or discuss?
Is anything that I have not asked you about in the interview that would be important for me to know about your experiences?

Thank you again for your participation. A summary of the results of this study will be shared with you once the study is completed. This may take anywhere up to a year or more to complete the analysis of the data and send you a summary of the findings.
Is there an alternative phone, email, or address that you would like to provide for the future year?

As a reminder, all information you shared with me is confidential. No real names will be used in the write up of the results of this study. Pseudonyms, or alternative names, will be used.

Do you have any questions about the use of this research or results of this study?
How has your experience been in the interview process of this research?
Please share any recommendations you have for me to improve on the interviews.
Please share any feedback you may have for me to improve on the research process for future studies.

Jazak Allahu Kheir (May Allah Reward You With Good).

Wa Salaam (With Peace),
Sister Nancy

Appendix H

Study Completion Email

Thank you once again for your participating in this research study titled, "*From the Arab World to the American World: Transition and Adjustment Experiences of Muslim Women*."
A summary of the findings of the study is included for your reference.

Jazak Allahu Kheir (May Allah Reward You With Good).

Wa Salaam (With Peace),
Sister Nancy

Appendix I

HSIRB Approval

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: January 16, 2015

To: Patrick Munley, Principal Investigator
Nancy Hammoudah, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 15-01-13

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "From the Arab World to the American World: Transition and Adjustment Experience of Muslim Women" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., ***you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study***)." Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: **January 15, 2016**

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